

BLOZAN, BENJAMIN C., D.M.A. Herbert Howells' *A Garland for de la Mare* Twelve Songs for Voice and Piano: Contexts for Performance (2013)  
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Because British composer Herbert Howells (1892-1983) decided in mid-career to concentrate his creative energies upon Anglican liturgical music, his many notable contributions to secular genres are often overlooked. This is certainly the case for *A Garland for de la Mare*, a collection of twelve songs for voice and piano on poems by Howells' longtime friend Walter de la Mare (1873-1956), a work nearly unknown in the United States. Its posthumous publication in 1995 also contributed to its failure to enter the art song canon.

The neglect suffered by this commemorative work—held in high esteem by all writers who have assessed it—is unfortunate and unwarranted. Howells and de la Mare are both ubiquitously regarded as master craftsmen in their respective disciplines. Additionally, they share a remarkable compatibility between musical and poetic languages which is vividly highlighted in the songs in *Garland*. The set gains additional significance by containing the only songs Howells worked on past 1934. Though early versions of several of the songs first appeared in 1919, the bulk of Howells' effort occurred much later in the mid-50s (surrounding de la Mare's death) and in the years leading up to the centenary of the poet's birth in 1973. As such, they display a confidence and economy indicative of a composer fully in possession of his creative voice.

This study aims to combat *Garland's* obscurity by inspiring interest in informed performances of the songs therein. It begins with biographical sketches of Howells and de la Mare, situating both men with regard to their contemporaries and surrounding artistic

movements. The subsequent chapter views *Garland* from four aspects: 1) a history of the set's complex and lengthy gestation, cross-referencing various sources to fill in the gaps found in each existing account and to resolve several inaccuracies; 2) an orientation to the poetry chosen for the set; 3) a summary of *Garland*'s main musical features which draws attention to three key components of Howells' compositional language—Tudor-style polyphony, an evocative harmonic language often associated with impressionism, and the incorporation of native folk elements; and 4) suggested ways in which the songs might be used by voice teachers and recitalists. The document culminates in detailed discussions of each song. These discussions delve deeper into de la Mare's lyrics and highlight the musical means through which Howells conveys his refined understanding thereof. The theme of the "collective genius" formed by these two creative minds runs throughout this section.

Though some the terminology encountered necessitates a musical education on the part of the reader, this reference source is aimed primarily at performers and avoids analysis of an exceedingly theoretical nature. A song collection of this artistic merit, evincing a rare level of craft and aesthetic compatibility between poet and composer deserves to be better known. This study presents a comprehensive and approachable guide to this work which intends to encourage its performance and secure its place in the body of mainstream vocal repertoire.

HERBERT *HOWELLS' A GARLAND FOR DE LA MARE*

TWELVE SONGS FOR VOICE AND PIANO:

CONTEXTS FOR PERFORMANCE

by

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## APPROVAL PAGE

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## PREFACE

The British composer Herbert Howells (1892-1983) is among the most respected and prolific masters of 20<sup>th</sup> century English choral music. For nearly a century, his masses, motets, and anthems have maintained a secure place in the Anglican choral repertoire. Though this notoriety has served Howells' legacy well, it has had the undesirable effect of obscuring his many notable contributions to other genres. Much of his diverse output—including concerti, large-scale works for orchestra, chamber music, numerous keyboard pieces, and songs, remains largely unknown even to those intimately familiar with his choral output.

This would likely not be the case had Howells continued to write for diverse genres all his life. However, the tragic sudden death of his son in 1935 brought about a change in focus, solidifying his dedication to the creation of sacred choral works and diminishing his attention to secular works. This abatement included song writing, a genre in which he had shown avid interest in prior to 1935. By that date, Howells had written all his seventy-four songs,<sup>1</sup> except for one final effort in this genre called *A Garland for de la Mare*—a set of twelve songs with texts from celebrated poet and longtime friend, Walter de la Mare (1873-1956). The work had an unusually long gestation and was published in 1995, twelve years after Howells' death. It includes eleven newly-released

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<sup>1</sup> This number (higher than that given by some writers on Howells) is an estimate, drawing mainly from Palmer's dissertation as well as the Chandos recording of Howells' complete songs. Complications such as lost manuscripts and the blurry line between a "sketch" and a full-fledged setting make a definitive number difficult to establish.

songs along with a reprint of his most familiar song “King David” which had been published in 1923.

Though some singers and pianists are familiar with Howells’ songs that were published during his lifetime, the songs in *Garland* remain almost completely unknown in the United States. In addition to the tendency to neglect Howells’ non-choral works, the set’s posthumous publication further hindered its reputation. A less-restricted circulation during Howells’ lifetime could only have increased the songs’ chances of entering the art song canon. The resultant obscurity is unfortunate considering their exceptional quality. Biographer Paul Spicer believes the set contains “some of the most beautiful, haunting songs in Howells’ output.”<sup>2</sup> British song expert Trevor Hold claims the set’s best songs “rank among his finest.”<sup>3</sup> A number of writers on British song have expressed regret that his published output in this medium is so small relative to his apparent gift. The addition of eleven new titles to the tally is surely a boon, particularly since they are the only songs to which the composer devoted his attention past the midpoint of his career. As such, they display a confidence and economy indicative of a composer fully in possession of his creative voice. *Garland* warrants additional attention given that the texts are by Howells’ favorite poet. Howells rarely composed more than one song from each of the twenty-seven poets he set (the one notable exception being his six settings of Wilfred Wilson Gibson), yet he created nineteen songs with texts of de la

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<sup>2</sup> Paul Spicer, *Herbert Howells* (Bridgend, Wales: Poetry Wales Press, 1998) 164.

<sup>3</sup> Trevor Hold, *Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song Composers* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005) 297.

Mare. Several critics hold the opinion that de la Mare's verse yielded Howells' best songwriting, a notion supported by the popularity of "King David."

The appreciation of *Garland* is enhanced by a familiarity with Howells and de la Mare as well as the makeup of their "collective genius."<sup>4</sup> Toward this end, this study begins with an assessment of the two men whose similar artistic bents coalesced into "a remarkable and moving partnership of equals"<sup>5</sup> in Howells' setting of de la Mare's verse. The second chapter examines *Garland* from a variety of aspects. It begins by recounting the history of the work, tracing its trajectory from the initial sketches in 1919 through Howells' periodic revisiting of the project over the next fifty years, and the final work of a devoted team of friends and colleagues that led to the set's publication in 1995. The chapter continues by providing both an orientation to the poetry Howells chose for *Garland* and an overview of Howells' unique musical language. The chapter ends with a section on practical aspects of the work's utility—how the songs might best be programmed for performance and utilized as teaching material. The study culminates with detailed discussions of all twelve songs, delving deeper into de la Mare's texts and highlighting the musical means through which Howells conveyed his refined understanding thereof. It is hoped that singers and collaborative pianists who are performing the songs (or considering doing so) will gain from this chapter a greater understanding and appreciation of the set and come away inspired to protect the work from neglect.

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<sup>4</sup> Spicer 68.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 68.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE COMPOSER AND POET

#### *Herbert Howells*

Herbert Howells maintained a high musical profile in England for much of the twentieth century. Through his activities as composer, educator, and adjudicator he touched the lives of the public as well as countless aspiring musicians. He came into contact with many of the major musical figures in England as well as Europe, becoming close friends with many, most notably Ralph Vaughan Williams, Gustav Holst, Gerald Finzi, and Ivor Gurney.

Howells eschewed public notoriety and never achieved a prominent international profile. However, numerous musicians and authors who have assessed his large output consistently place him among England's most gifted composers of the last century. Among them are Christopher Palmer, who called him "one of England's greatest polyphonists,"<sup>6</sup> Bernard Benoliel, who felt him to be "the greatest British composer of his generation,"<sup>7</sup> and Simon Lindley, who spoke of him as "the last great English Romantic

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<sup>6</sup> Christopher Palmer, *Herbert Howells: A Century Celebration* (London: Thames, 1992) 56.

<sup>7</sup> Bernard Benoliel, "Herbert Howells (1892-1983)," *Tempo* (June 1983) 145.

composer.”<sup>8</sup> Howells is considered by many to have almost singlehandedly revitalized Anglican Church music.

Howells came of age as the movement termed the English Musical Renaissance had gathered momentum. This comprehensive national campaign aimed at vivifying England’s notoriously lackluster musical activity began toward the latter third of the nineteenth century and continued into the first quarter of the twentieth. The movement consisted of many political, social, and educational influences, and unquestionably one its greatest impacts consisted of the concurrent revival of both indigenous folk song and Tudor-era polyphony. Interest in these areas became widespread and involved many devotees. However, two men stand out due to the immensity of their impact: Cecil Sharpe and Sir Richard Runciman Terry.

Cecil Sharpe stood at the forefront of the folk revival movement, tirelessly recording and cataloguing British folk music both in Great Britain and on an ambitious trip to remote areas of Appalachia where Scots-Irish melodies had been preserved for generations. His work and others’ placed the wealth of Britain’s folk music heritage easily within reach of interested musicians, strengthening its presence within the national consciousness. Terry, who presided as Music Director for Downside Abbey in Somerset from 1901 to 1924, initiated a revival of the liturgical masses of great sixteenth-century composers such as Thomas Tallis, William Byrd, and John Taverner. More than any other person, he provided composers of the early twentieth century with access to the treasure of England’s sacred choral heritage. In addition to performing classic works of

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<sup>8</sup> Simon Lindley, *Howells: Romanticism in Retrospect* (An address given at King’s College, 2001) Available: <http://www.simonlindley.org.uk/howells.html>.

antiquity, Terry's activities both at Downside and Westminster Abbeys included commissioning new English choral works, an opportunity seized by both Vaughan Williams and Howells. Not surprisingly, the frequent performances of Tudor composers exerted an influence on contemporary composers, many of whom, like Howells, were eager to join this lineage by adopting age-old techniques in their own works.

Research into their native musical roots provided English composers with the primary means to circumvent reliance on the prevailing Teutonic and Italian models. Vaughan Williams and Holst were the first to gain widespread success by infusing their works with indigenous folk elements. In the biography of her father, Imogen Holst underlines the impact English folk music had on his music, stating that folk-song "finally brushed away all traces of Wagner."<sup>9</sup> Vaughan Williams and Holst drew heavily on England's rich tradition of polyphonic church music as well. This genre, the only one which England could claim to have excelled for centuries, became a natural source of influence for composers wishing to eschew continental influences. Vaughan Williams' *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* (1910), the quintessential musical embodiment of this new nationalism, had a profound impact on the young Herbert Howells.

The growing belief in the importance of "art for art's sake" prompted the allocation of funds to create world-class artistic training grounds. Both Holst and Vaughan Williams benefitted from the rigorous training they received from the newly-established Royal College of Music (RCM). Its two main founders, Charles Villiers

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<sup>9</sup> Arthur LaPierre, *Herbert Howells' Requiem for Unaccompanied Voices as a Manifestation of the New English Musical Renaissance Compositional Style*, diss., U of North Colorado, 1996 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1996, 9722313) 27. The quote is from Holst's daughter Imogen.

Stanford and Herbert Parry, became the chief architects of the musical renaissance via their immense influence as educators and as composers. It was within this nurturing environment of England's newfound musical confidence and self-reliance that Howells experienced his artistic upbringing.

Prior to attending the RCM, Howells had been studying as an "articled pupil" of organist Herbert Brewer, along with contemporary composer Ivor Gurney. Under Brewer's guidance he gained the rudiments of theory and counterpoint along with keyboard training. Influenced by Gurney, who had been accepted at the RCM and reported back enthusiastically, Howells devoted himself to the creation of a portfolio of compositions that gained him entrance to the RCM in 1912. With Stanford and Parry still at the helm, it remained England's premier musical training ground.

Howells stood out as one of the most promising musical minds of his generation. He quickly became Stanford's favorite pupil, one of the few who never elicited the professor's famous temper. Stanford called Howells "my son in music"<sup>10</sup> and late in life bequeathed a family ring to him.<sup>11</sup> Parry also took a paternal role in Howells' life, devoting as much attention to his musical education as to efforts to protect him from the dangers of the First World War. Both men helped in whatever way they could to establish his early career and remained friends with Howells until the ends of their lives. Howells

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<sup>10</sup> Palmer, *Centenary Celebration* 52.

<sup>11</sup> The ring had already accumulated a great deal of history before it came to Stanford (who wore it for about 50 years). Howells in turn bequeathed it to his daughter (and celebrated actress) Ursula. See further Palmer *Centenary Celebration* pages 51-52.

was well-liked and admired by his fellow students—“a cozy family”<sup>12</sup> that included Gurney, Benjamin Bliss, and Arthur Benjamin.

As an emerging composer, Howells was astoundingly prolific. His reputation quickly established itself through a steady stream of orchestral and chamber works, including his Fantasy Quartet (1918), which won the Cobbett prize. However, he was not fully invested in composing as a career, perhaps due to a heightened sensitivity to critical opinion. The negative reception of his second piano concerto in 1925 caused him to withdraw the work and shy from composition for a period. To support his family, and out of a genuine desire to train and encourage young musicians, Howells chose a busy schedule of teaching and adjudicating. Often, as was also the case with Holst, these duties took precedence over composing. Nonetheless, they resulted in a remarkable teaching career: Howells achieved the record for the longest tenure at the RCM (1920-1979), succeeded Holst as the Director of Music at the St. Paul’s Girls School in 1936 (a position he held until 1962), and from 1954-1964 held the King Edward Professor of Music post at London University. His rigorous duties as an educator and sought-after adjudicator, his lack of ambition to promote his works in general and especially abroad, along with his squeamishness regarding the critical reception of his works may ultimately have limited his stature as a composer. Nevertheless, he composed steadily for most his long life, remaining faithful to his unique voice, and produced a large body of music that touched nearly all genres.

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<sup>12</sup> Palmer, *Centenary Celebration* 16.

Howells life and career is marked by a watershed event in 1935, when his nine-year-old son Michael died suddenly from polio. Howells was devastated and in the months that followed wrote almost nothing. Eventually, he was able to compose as a way to recover from his grief. As he once stated in an interview, “It’s no exaggeration to say that it was my work on *Hymnus* and the understanding and patient help of my wife, Dorothy, which renewed my concern for a busy and ordinary way of life.”<sup>13</sup> The work referred to is his *Hymnus Paradisi*—a large work for choir and orchestra completed in 1938. Howells suppressed it due to the intensely personal inspiration behind its composition until Vaughan Williams prevailed upon him to perform it at the Three Choirs Festival in 1950.<sup>14</sup>

Howells never entirely recovered from Michael’s death, and afterward his music reflected a change of perspective. Although he was not an overtly religious man, he became less interested in secular music, preferring to compose sacred works wherein the chaste beauty and inwardly searching pathos of his later style found a compatible environment. His training with the choral master Stanford, his early exposure to the classic polyphonists thanks to Terry, and his full absorption of current harmonic vocabulary all coalesced into a unique compositional style. By the mid-1940’s Howells was at the forefront of Anglican Church music.

This shift of focus nearly brought an end to Howells’ song writing. The bulk of his songs date from the first two decades of his output which coincided with a golden era

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<sup>13</sup> Christopher Palmer, *Herbert Howells: A Study* (Kent: Novello, 1978) 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> The Three Choirs Festival began in 1719 and is hosted (in rotation) by the cathedrals of Hereford, Gloucester, and Worcester.



in British song. During the first part of the twentieth century a large market for song was served by a number of excellent composers including Vaughan Williams, Roger Quilter, Ivor Gurney, William Walton, Peter Warlock, and Gerald Finzi. Howells first turned his attention to song writing in 1911 with a set of five songs (included in his application portfolio for RCM) dedicated to a young singer who eventually became his wife. His next set, *Five Songs for High Voice and Orchestra, Op. 10*, emerged at the start of his five most prolific years with regard to art song, as well as composition in general. By the end of 1920, well over half of his seventy four songs had been composed (and others sketched, as we will see in the history of *Garland for de la Mare*). The sets *Three Rondeaux*; *Four Songs, Op. 22*; *Four French Chansons*; and *Peacock Pie* are from this period. The twenties saw only eight newly composed songs from Howells, though in 1928 he published a reworked version of his *Op. 10* for voice and piano, eliminating one song in exchange for a new one. The last songs published during his lifetime were *Flood* and *Lost Love*, in 1933 and 1934, just prior to Michael's death.

Howells' regard for song composition is somewhat curious. On the one hand, the high-level imaginative inspiration and technical execution consistently found in his settings suggests substantial commitment to the art form. Yet, of his seventy-four songs, almost half were left unpublished at the time of his death. Surely, had he wanted to, Howells could have pursued their publication. Palmer's suggestion that song writing for Howells was perhaps "a relaxation, a hobby, something one did for the sheerest love of, and joy in, doing it" comports with a statement made by the composer himself: "In

general I've always written first and foremost because I wanted and needed to write; performance, publication and the rest I tend, rightly or wrongly, to leave to others.”<sup>15</sup>

After 1934, the only songs he “wanted and needed to write” were the songs of *Garland*. As the later chapter on the work’s history will detail, Howells devoted most of his attention to the project around de la Mare’s death in 1956 and later from 1969-1973 as the centenary of the poet’s birth approached. With one exception—his work on “The Lady Caroline”—the span of time between Howells’ last published song and his work on *Garland* can be measured in decades. This makes clear the special position the songs in *Garland* hold with regard to the rest of his song output. None have the clear indebtedness to Vaughan Williams of his earliest songs, or the experimental quality of *Peacock Pie*. Hold comments, “All are imbued with the mature Howells style, the *angst*-suffused, bittersweet world of *Hymnus Paradisi*.”<sup>16</sup>

#### *Walter de la Mare*

Walter de la Mare (1873-1956) is most admired for his novels and poetry and is widely recognized as an innovator of children’s literature in both genres. In addition to fiction and verse, de la Mare wrote essays and compiled several ambitious anthologies on various subjects. Similar to Howells, his current lack of notoriety is unindicative of the widespread popularity his works enjoyed during his life. “No writer is better known, or

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<sup>15</sup> Palmer, *A Study* 14.

<sup>16</sup> Trevor Hold, *From Parry to Finzi: Twenty English Song Composers* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2005) 302.

better loved, in the English speaking world,”<sup>17</sup> wrote author Leonard Clark, and Robert Frost once estimated him to be “the greatest of living poets,” calling *Listeners* “the greatest poem in English in recent years.”<sup>18</sup>

De la Mare’s literary accomplishments are all the more noteworthy considering that he was largely self-taught. His high school journal and a local drama club provided outlets for his adolescent interest in writing. This interest persisted into adulthood and during an eighteen-year stint as a bookkeeper for an oil company he published his first two works: the book of poetry *Songs of Childhood* (1902) and the novel *Henry Brocken* (1904). These early efforts revealed a talent which was recognized with a Civil List pension in 1908, allowing him to leave the oil company and devote himself to writing full time. This stability allowed for an immensely prolific output.

De la Mare was twenty-nine at the time of his first publication, and the main features of his artistic vision were already in place. Perhaps because of his autodidacticism, he had achieved a unique voice. The many threads of influence he wove together to form his style resist deciphering, especially given the paucity of early biographical information. His self-imposed education in literature was extremely wide-ranging. Not only was he a literary expert on the Victorian period which preceded him, he steeped himself in the centuries-old tradition of the English ballad and quatrain and

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<sup>17</sup> Leonard Clark, “A Handlist of the Writings in Book Form of Walter de la Mare (1902-1953),” *Studies in Bibliography*, Vol. 6, 1954 197.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in Hoffman Tyler, *Robert Frost and The Politics of Poetry* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2001) 47.

was further influenced by metaphysical poets<sup>19</sup> including John Donne, Henry Vaughan, and George Herbert. Often he borrowed from, or worked within, the vast tradition of styles with which he was familiar, with the result that traditionalism—and often archaism—coexisted with modern innovations. As author Mary Loges states, “De la Mare’s poetry is in many ways a criticism of and conversation with his poetic precursors.”<sup>20</sup>

Among his contemporaries, de la Mare shares some resemblance to Hardy and Frost, as all three practiced within the English lyric tradition. These three poets formed a lineage of influence. De la Mare met Hardy in 1916 and partook in informal artistic gatherings at the venerated writer’s Max Gate estate. De la Mare is thought to have increased the subjectivity of his poems as a result of his contact with Hardy. Frost met de la Mare shortly after moving to London in 1912. Frost’s famous poem “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” shows marked similarities with the de la Mare poem he so admired, “Listeners.”

Though the above three poets resemble each other technically and in their dark sensibility, de la Mare’s poetic voice is generally much less personal. Much of the time we are unaware of the poet as a subject. This transparent quality of poetic voice reflects the widespread influence of the French symbolist poets, which was present in such English writers as Oscar Wilde and Richard Le Gallienne. Yeats is linked to the

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<sup>19</sup> Mary Loges, *The Poetry of Walter de la Mare: A Re-Evaluation*, diss., U of Denver, 1985 (Ann Arbor: UMI, 1985, 8524520) 1-2.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 4.

symbolist movement as well, and in the folk-based, fairy world of his early poetry additional similarities can be found between him and de la Mare.

De la Mare is often associated with the Georgian poetic movement and is frequently considered its most illustrious member. The term “Georgian” was not given to certain poets retrospectively as a historical classification, as one might think, but rather was coined at the beginning of George V’s reign as a deliberate attempt on the part of poet Rupert Brooke and arts patron Edward Marsh to revitalize the public’s interest in poetry by drawing attention to promising young poets. Five volumes of Georgian poetry were published between 1912 and 1922, and their initial success helped enormously to establish de la Mare’s reputation.<sup>21</sup> As time went on, however, the group was criticized as conservative and out of touch with the tumult of current events. Disparaging comments by Edith Sitwell, Ezra Pound, and other modernist poets linked the term “Georgian” to escapism—into the bucolic country side and into childhood. Though the experimentalists tended to exempt de la Mare from their critiques of the Georgians in general, his association with that movement via Marsh’s publications negatively impacted his reputation.

Regardless of public opinion, de la Mare remained true to his primary preoccupation. From the beginning, he was interested in human consciousness—primarily its borders and its different states—and his lengthy career as a writer allowed a sustained exploration of this theme. In her study on de la Mare, Mary Loges states that his is “a poetry of doubt, conflict, and uncertainty,” highlighting that he chose to base his

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<sup>21</sup> Other notable poets featured in the “Georgian” volumes include John Masefield, W.H. Davies, Rupert Brooke, and D.H. Lawrence.

poems on “experiences that bring consciousness into awareness of its limits, such as death, dream, and imagination.”<sup>22</sup> A reviewer of one of de la Mare’s last collections of poetry provided a similar summation of his work:

All his literary life de la Mare has been pondering a small number of ultimate questions: What is death? What instruments of knowledge do all men (or some) have besides the intellect? How does the exercise of intellect affect the operation of these instruments? What is lost as childhood recedes? [...] De la Mare is one of those “who sigh still with their last breath “why?”<sup>23</sup>

De la Mare firmly believed the chief “instrument of knowledge” besides the intellect was imagination, which he viewed as the “shaping spirit” of man.<sup>24</sup> In his essay “Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination,” de la Mare describes his concept of “childlike imagination”—the highly idiosyncratic, visionary state at the beginning of human life. “Between [the child’s] dream and their reality,” he writes, “looms no impassable abyss. There is no solitude more secluded as a child’s, no absorption more complete, no insight more exquisite and, one might even add, more comprehensive.”<sup>25</sup> Theorizing further that most peoples’ “childlike imagination” retreats to some degree as an unfortunate consequence of entry into adulthood, he aimed in his poetry and prose to speak to and from that fragile state of consciousness, to nourish its presence in the reader.

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<sup>22</sup> Loges 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> E.K. Brown, “The Epilogue to Mr. de la Mare’s Poetry,” *Poetry Magazine* May 1946: 95.

<sup>24</sup> Doris McCrosson, *Walter de la Mare*, Twayne’s English Authors Ser. 33 (New York: Twayne, 1966) 16.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 193.

In line with his interest in different states of consciousness, de la Mare had an intense fascination with and reverence for dreams. The quote from hymn writer, theologian, and poet Isaac Watts, “He told his dreams to me . . .,” supplied at the beginning of *Peacock Pie* (from which many of the songs in *Garland* come), reflects his perception that his poems often emerged from dreams. Often his poems establish a dream-like mood and appeal to the non-analytical, subconscious mind. Such was his passion for dreams that in 1939 he published *Behold, This Dreamer!*, a collection of writings from over four hundred sources on the subject.<sup>26</sup> To de la Mare, dreams were given equal rank to the imagination as a way of apprehending reality, believing we cannot know with certainty that what we call “waking” life is any more real than the dream world. He theorized that dreams might be reverberations from past lives, they may provide access to collective race memories, and they might represent a return to one’s true existence—a respite from the circumscribed reality of a single human life. Some of these themes are found in the following examples from his poetry:

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<sup>26</sup> Walter de la Mare, *Behold, This Dreamer: of reverie, night, sleep, dream, love-dreams, nightmare, death, the unconscious, the imagination, divination, the artist, and kindred subjects* (London: Faber, 1939, reprinted 2009).

Sweep softly thy strings, Musician  
The minutes mount to hours  
Frost on the windless casement weaves  
A labyrinth of flowers  
Ghosts linger in the darkening air  
Hearken at the open door  
Music hath called them dreaming  
Home once more

“Song of Shadows” from *Peacock Pie*, lines 9-16.<sup>27</sup>

Hide and seek, say I,  
To myself, and step  
Out of the dream of Wake  
Into the dream of Sleep.

“Hide and Seek” from *Peacock Pie*, lines 9-12.

This conception of human life as in exile from an ultimate unity with mankind fueled de la Mare’s preoccupation with death—even in his writings for the young. But despite some of his writings being labeled “psychological horror,”<sup>28</sup> his treatment of the subject was not morbid. In his view, perhaps life “will prove to have been in the nature of a dream, and death of an awakening.” De la Mare believed that places are infused with the presence of spirits—ranging from lovely, to benign, to dreadful—from those who formerly occupied them.

Those who admire de la Mare’s poetry often praise its unique and uncanny quality, which appeals to a part of us outside the intellect. The primary characteristics of de la Mare’s aesthetic include an innovative approach to rhyme and meter, supernatural

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<sup>27</sup> *Peacock Pie, A book of Rhymes* is available as a free eBook on the Gutenberg Project website among other sites which reproduce books in the public domain.

<sup>28</sup> Some examples of de la Mare’s writing that might be referred to as psychological horror are “Out of the Deep,” “The Return,” and “Seaton’s Aunt.”



themes, abundant archaisms that imbue the poems with a timeless and mysterious aura, and the musicality of his diction stemming from his careful attention to the rhythm and sound of words. This last trait is responsible for his verse being set more by English composers than any other poet during the nineteen-teens and twenties—a remarkable feat when considering some of his literary companions were William Butler Yeats, A. E. Housman, and W. H. Davies.

Assessment of de la Mare's merits as a poet began during his career and has continued since his death. Many hold him in high regard while others point to his complete neglect of the modern world as evidence of his poetry's irrelevance, escapism, and preciousness. Some are perturbed or disappointed that his work tends to put forth questions but no answers; others relish this yearning quality. However, his craft is rarely questioned and his attention to sound is ubiquitously commended. De la Mare's reputation as a poet is most secure with regard to children's verse, a fact of particular relevance to *Garland*, since all but two of the twelve songs use texts from children's collections. The "Overview" chapter below explores this facet of his output.

## CHAPTER II

### ASPECTS OF THE WORK

#### *History*

The history of *Garland for de la Mare* is both fascinating and complex. Howells' sporadic work on the set spanned over fifty years and was a labor of love, both in terms of his enjoyment of the poetry and his personal affection for de la Mare, his friend of nearly forty years. The songs received public airing during his lifetime, yet despite Howells' lengthy devotion to the set he never fully readied it for publication. At the time of his death, competing drafts existed, variances in texts had not been resolved, and no order had been established. It remained for a devoted team of friends and colleagues who, near the end of his life and after his death, sorted through his numerous revisions and performed the necessary editorial work to make the work suitable for publication. Their work resulted in the 1995 edition by Thames Publishing<sup>29</sup>, which at the time of this study is sold by Boosey and Hawkes.

The first chapter in the history of *Garland* began in early 1919. Howells had been drawn, like many of his contemporaries, to de la Mare's *Peacock Pie, a Book of Rhymes* and chose over a dozen verses to set. The two men had become friends by that time, as is shown in a letter from de la Mare to Howells and dated February 11 of that year:

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<sup>29</sup> Herbert Howells, *A Garland for de la Mare: Ten Songs for Voice and Piano* (London: Thames, 1995). Note the error in song count.

I am delighted to hear that *King David* is finished and on its way. Please let me see a copy as soon as you can. What is happening to the other *Peacock Pie* songs? Please come down to Anerly and see us again some Sunday when you are free [...]<sup>30</sup>

This period of songwriting yielded over a dozen de la Mare settings, though only seven were published: a set of six songs published as *Peacock Pie* in 1923 and “King David,” also published in 1923. *Peacock Pie* features the most experimental song writing of Howells’ output, reflecting an awareness of Bartók and Stravinsky, and clearly meant for children. “King David,” with its broader and loftier appeal, was not included among them.

Numerous sources attest to Howells’ plan to publish a second group of *Peacock Pie* songs. Both Palmer and Peter Hodgson (who wrote his well-respected PhD thesis on Howells with the benefit of interviewing the composer) include a second *Peacock Pie* set in their catalogs of his complete works. A 1920 article in *The Musical Times* (predating the publication of the six *Peacock Pie* songs) surveyed Howells output, listing “‘Peacock Pie,’ 12 songs” among his then-composed works.<sup>31</sup> And finally, Hugh Ottaway mentions the “two cycles of Peacock Pie” in his 1967 article “Herbert Howells and the English Revival.”<sup>32</sup> It is unclear whether these accounts of a second set reflect notoriety gained

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<sup>30</sup> Oxford library holds a (perhaps complete) collection of de la Mare’s letter to Howells.

<sup>31</sup> Edwin Evans, “Modern British Composers. VII. Herbert Howells,” *The Musical Times* Vol. 61, No. 925, (Mar., 1920): 159.

<sup>32</sup> Hugh Ottaway, “Herbert Howells and the English Revival,” *The Musical Times*, Vol. 108, No. 1496, (Oct. 1967): 899.

through actual performance or, rather, Howells habit of counting it among his works when consulted by the above writers.

Hodgson's ambitious thesis provided a much-needed assessment of Howells' musical output and is all the more valuable for having been written in the late sixties while the composer could still be consulted. Yet, while it is deservedly respected and referenced by Howells scholars, it lacks accuracy regarding some details of *Garland*. Perhaps this is due to an overreliance on Howells' memory. Palmer's coverage of the work's genesis is more comprehensive and more trustworthy. Such was his meticulousness that he provided a "diary chronology" of many of Howells' works including *Garland*. Palmer's list of songs belonging to *Peacock Pie, set 2* (see Figure 1) includes two titles omitted by Hodgson. Asterisks denote songs which were neither published separately nor in the final version of *Garland*.

Figure 1. *Peacock Pie, set 2* (According to Palmer).

1. Someone Came Knocking (Later titled "Some One" in  
*A Garland for de la Mare*)
2. The Old Stone House
3. Old Shellover"
4. Andy Battle
5. The Old Soldier
6. The Ride-by-Nights\*
7. The Lady Caroline
8. Cake and Sack\*
9. Poor Jim Jay\*
10. Will Ever\*

Hodgson reported that this initial preoccupation with de la Mare songs lasted from 1919-1925, an estimation made by Howells. The next record of any such setting of de la

Mare texts comes from a diary entry mentioning the composition of “The Lady Caroline” “In Sumsion’s house at 20 College Green, Gloucester, 2 Jan. 1936.” (Howells’ work on this setting was, if not the first, an early instance of composition after the tragic death of Howells’ son in summer of 1935.) This seems to contradict Palmer’s and Hodgson’s inclusion of that song in their *Peacock Pie, set 2* catalogues, unless it was merely sketched in those earlier years. Moreover, the poem is not from *Peacock Pie* but from another collection of de la Mare’s verse: *Songs of Childhood*.

Howells’ work on “Lady Caroline” in 1936, after such a long break in song writing, may suggest that he had begun to envision a set of songs that would eventually form a commemorative “garland.” More likely, it was de la Mare’s death in June of 1956 that formed the inspiration. The word “Garland” received its first mention on record in Howells’ diary entry from August of 1957. The project by then had become a “major preoccupation.”<sup>33</sup>

As comprehensive as Palmer’s chronology is, he neglected one important facet of the history of *Garland*. A review in *The Musical Times* from December 1957 of a recital given by baritone Francis Loring on October 23, 1957 shows that the program included the “premiere of *A Garland for de la Mare*.” This is the first public use of that title on record. Howells’ work, documented by diary entries from August 6 to September 2, appears to have been in preparation for this recital. The version Loring performed consisted of only six songs: “The Lady Caroline,” “Andy Battle,” “Jim Jay,” “Some One,” “Before Dawn,” and “King David.”

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<sup>33</sup> Palmer, *Centenary Celebration* 486.

Comparing the Loring recital to *Peacock Pie, set 2* (Figure 1), one notices two new de la Mare titles, “Before Dawn” and “Jim Jay.” “Jim Jay,” described by the reviewer as “spontaneous,” does not show up in the current version published by Thames and is not available either in score form or on a recording. At the time of Hodgson’s research in the late 1960’s it was, however, still a part of the collection as envisioned by Howells. The poem is an example of de la Mare’s “nonsense” verse. Perhaps Howells ultimately decided to limit the number of overtly “childish” poems in *Garland* to give the set a broader representation of de la Mare work than was achieved in *Peacock Pie*.

The other new song from the Loring recital, “Before Dawn,” comes from *The Veil and Other Poems*, published in 1921. This song illustrates the revision-heavy process many of Howells’ works underwent. The editors of the Thames edition had to contend with seven, often heavily annotated, versions of this particular song. With this title only, a complete additional version is supplied in the Thames edition, owing to it having been labeled by Christopher Palmer as a definitive version.<sup>34</sup> The reviewer of the 1957 Loring concert wrote unfavorably about “Before Dawn,” calling the experience “disappointing,” “the beautiful Christmas message falling flat on the ear.”<sup>35</sup> The many subsequent revisions may suggest Howells found himself plagued by doubts regarding work as a result of this criticism.

Howells’ diary indicates that he took a half-year hiatus from the work once it was ready for Loring to perform in October 1957. He resumed the project in February of 1958

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<sup>34</sup> See “Editorial Commentary” in preface to Thames score, page 6.

<sup>35</sup> David Money et al, “Opera and Concert Notices: London,” *The Musical Times* Vol. 98, No. 1378, (Dec., 1957): 682.

and worked on it until August. *Garland* then lay dormant for ten years, aside from the composition of “The Old Soldier” in 1962. True to the commemorative spirit of the work, Howells recommenced work in the years leading up to the hundredth anniversary of de la Mare’s birth in 1973. This final phase of composition began in 1969.

In 1973, the Schubert Society of Great Britain sponsored a series of performances honoring de la Mare who, to reiterate, was the poet most often set in the golden age of British song.<sup>36</sup> The evening consisted of poetry readings and performances of song settings of his verse. The roster of represented composers included Herbert Howells, Benjamin Britten, Lennox Berkeley, and Ivor Gurney. Loring was involved with this project as well. Though no detailed record of these performances appears to be available, it seems Howells would have been eager to feature the new or newly-revised *Garland* songs he had been working on in the years prior. After 1973, his work on the project ceased.

In the early 1980’s, as Howells’ death seemed imminent, several friends and colleagues became intent on assembling the various manuscripts of *Garland* into an intact version that could be published while the composer could still be consulted. Chief among this team was Palmer, whose growing interest in Howells resulted in two publications: an article on the occasion of his eightieth birthday<sup>37</sup> and his 1978 booklet entitled “Herbert

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<sup>36</sup> Stephen Banfield, *Sensibility and English Song* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 210.

<sup>37</sup> Christopher Palmer, “Herbert Howells at 80: A Retrospect,” *The Musical Times*, Vol. 133, No. 1796 (Oct. 1972): 967-970.

Howells: a Study.”<sup>38</sup> He was joined by Joan Littlejohn, a former student of Howells, who supplied a portion of “A Queer Story” when a page was presumed missing. Howells approved this segment a year before his death (provided as an *ossia* in the Thames score), but thankfully the original was recovered. In 1982, fair copies of the songs had been produced, yet according to the preface of the Thames edition “Howells made further revisions after this date.”<sup>39</sup> *Garland* bears the distinction of likely being the last work to which Howells turned his attention.

Howells died in 1983, but publication of *Garland* would have to wait for twelve years. Howells had once told Palmer that “King David” must be part of the set and that its prior publication would be an impediment to the entire work’s publication. Apparently this remained an issue. Palmer wrote in 1992 that “No doubt some arrangement could have been—may still be—arrived at”.

A resurgence of interest in Howells resulted following the centenary of his birth in 1992. Perhaps the most significant example was the ambitious recording project launched by the Chandos label which involved orchestral, choral, piano, and chamber works as well as a two-CD set of his complete songs.<sup>40</sup> The publication of *Garland* in 1995 was undoubtedly spurred by this renewed attention. Palmer, who had contributed the liner notes to the complete songs CD and had written his extraordinarily ambitious

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<sup>38</sup> Christopher Palmer, *Herbert Howells: A Study* (Kent: Novello, 1978).

<sup>39</sup> Preface to Thames score 6.

<sup>40</sup> Herbert Howells, *Herbert Howells: Songs* Chandos, 1994, CD.



“Centenary Celebration”<sup>41</sup> of Howells, remained at the center of the efforts to publish the work. It is regrettable that such a tireless supporter of Howells did not live one more year to see the release of *Garland* release in print. Palmer died in 1994, at which time the prominent voice teacher and noted song expert Michael Pilkington “stepped into the breach to sort out the remaining textual problems and see the publication through to completion.”<sup>42</sup> He was joined in this effort by Julius Drake, the pianist for the Chandos recording.

### *Poetry*

Ten of the twelve poems in *Garland for de la Mare* are designated as children’s verse. Of those ten, nine are from *Peacock Pie, A Book of Rhymes* (1913) and one is from de la Mare’s first book of poetry *Songs from Childhood*, published in 1902 under the pseudonym Walter Ramal. These two collections were the first works of what would become a large body of children’s poetry written by de la Mare. In 1978, assessing this corpus in its entirety, the poet Leonard Clark, also a writer of children’s poetry, concluded that “Walter de la Mare belongs to that small company of major poets who have also written for the young. It is a company that includes William Blake, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Rudyard Kipling. In output, range, and quality his is the greatest of

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<sup>41</sup> Christopher Palmer, *Herbert Howells: A Centenary Celebration* (London: Thames, 1992).

<sup>42</sup> Preface to Thames score, page 4.

all.”<sup>43</sup> Mary Loges proposes that de la Mare’s success as a children’s poet owes to the fact that “he refused to be constrained by the genre.”<sup>44</sup> She and others have also cited his authentic approach to children, which was devoid of sentimentality, preciousness, patronizing tone, or the wish to reform them. “His poems reflect his fascination and delight in children,” McCrosson writes, “and, even more apparently, his knowledge of them. He seems to know almost instinctively what appeals to them as well as what they are really like.”<sup>45</sup> This observation was echoed by Elizabeth Nesbitt, who wrote, “There had been others, and would be others, who write for childhood with a sure touch, but none with his penetrating and illuminating insight.”<sup>46</sup> De la Mare said that he wrote “The Three Mulla-mulgars” mainly to entertain his children. Clearly his role as a father deepened this insight.

Often, de la Mare did not distinguish between poetry for children and the general public but approached them with the same maturity and artistic commitment. It is important to realize that while ten poems in *Garland* are drawn from children’s collections, only three are likely to strike the reader/listener as clearly childlike—those which give an obvious nod to the folk-rhyme genre. The majority are indistinguishable in tone from the two poems selected from de la Mare’s adult collections, “Before Dawn”

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<sup>43</sup> Loges 186. Loges quotes Leonard Clark from his 1978 book, “Twentieth Century Children’s Writers.”

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. 187.

<sup>45</sup> McCrosson 64.

<sup>46</sup> Loges 186.

and “The Three Cherry Trees.” “Before Dawn” appeared in the collection *The Veil and other Poems* (1921); “The Three Cherry Trees” is from *The Listeners* (1912).

De la Mare’s children’s verse exhibits the influences primarily of William Blake and Christina Rossetti. The title of his 1902 collection *Songs of Childhood* seems intentionally reminiscent of Blake’s *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. Blake and de la Mare share what Loges calls a “simple, clear, visionary”<sup>47</sup> voice in their respective children’s poems. De la Mare’s interest in Rossetti is apparent by his decision to publish a book of selections from her poetry. From Rossetti he inherited the practice of sound play meant to be enjoyed on a sensual and sonic level by the young reader.

De la Mare wrote at an auspicious time in children’s literature. He had many recent authors from which to glean inspiration—groundbreaking children’s authors who explored the possibility of writing for the young with the principal goal of entertainment and delight rather than instruction. His familiarity with the great Victorian children’s authors is evinced by his perceptive and admiring writings on Rossetti, H.C. Andersen, Edward Lear, Beatrix Potter, and Lewis Carroll (to whom he gave tribute with a biography).<sup>48</sup>

Like all of these authors, de la Mare was steeped in the English folklore tradition. Rossetti and Andersen, in particular, belonged to a long line of writers who created original stories and rhymes that consciously imitated folktales and rhymes. De la Mare

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 193.

<sup>48</sup> Walter de la Mare, *Lewis Carroll* (London: Faber, 1932.)

published his own retellings of folktales.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, many of his stories and poems for the young clearly adopted folk idioms. “The Old Soldier,” “A Queer Story,” and “Andy Battle” are examples of folk-inspired poems in *Garland*.

Supernatural themes abound in de la Mare’s children’s poetry. Often he evokes, as Woodward pointed out, “strange beasts lurking at the edge of consciousness, only just out of the reaches of our five senses, dimly sensed by our sixth.” The use of spirits, ghosts, or specters by de la Mare was more than a mere conceit employed to capture a child’s interest. Rather, it was reflective of his personal experience. As his essays attest, de la Mare felt that he had seen ghosts and had been aware of presences. McCrosson states:

In de la Mare’s world, not only is every creature inhabited by a spirit but every house, every garden, every place where man has been at one time retains ghosts, presences; and in his most anthologized poem, he calls them “listeners.” When one talks of a house having “personality,” one is saying in a rather commonplace way what de la Mare felt was true in the deepest sense.<sup>50</sup>

Four poems in *Garland* feature supernatural inhabitants or visitors: “The Old Stone House,” “The Three Cherry Trees,” “Some One,” and “The Old House.” Both the supernatural and folk elements in de la Mare’s verse will be discussed in more detail in the song discussions that follow.

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<sup>49</sup> Walter de la Mare, *Told Again: Traditional Tales* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1927).

<sup>50</sup> McCrosson 58.

### *Compositional Features*

[Howells' music] is a private spiritual experience and his aim was to conjure a very specific atmosphere. –Paul Spicer<sup>51</sup>

David Wilcocks claimed that Howells' "highly personal mode of expression [...] makes most of his works, though varied in scope and texture, immediately recognizable."<sup>52</sup> This statement certainly applies to the songs of *A Garland for de la Mare* which are miniature distillations of his decidedly idiomatic musical language. As Palmer states in the preface to the *Garland* score, "they could be the work of no other composer."

Although Howells' inimitable style was largely a result of a unique and clever mind, he worked within established practices—some centuries-old—that are easily dissected. The three key components from which he fashioned his musical language are polyphony reminiscent of the Tudor period, a harmonic vocabulary and aesthetic philosophy in line with the main tenets of Impressionism, and lastly, idioms of British folk music. He can be said to be an innovator, not as an iconoclast, but in the sense that he found novel ways to amalgamate these various borrowed strands of influence.

The formation of a musical style which was profoundly English yet also embraced contemporary influence was modeled by Vaughan Williams. Vaughan Williams had the

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Spicer, *Celebration of Herbert Howells* (An Address to Friends of Saint Mary's Barnes), Nov. 6, 2011 4.

<sup>52</sup> From the forward to Palmer, *A Study* by David Wilcocks, page 6.

greatest impact on Howells of any composer, perhaps simply by being a kindred spirit who had already begun to work in a manner to which Howells was destined.

Ralph and I felt and reacted to things musically in a very similar way, and if some of our works are alike in any respect, it's not, I think, merely a question of influence but also of intuitive affinity. We both came from the same part of the world and loved it dearly; we were both attracted by Tudor music, plainsong and the modes—my interest in folk music was perhaps more for its modal coloring than for its human association. We felt we needed to write in these modes and in the pentatonic scale; there was no question of our using them simply because they were novel.<sup>53</sup>

From his first contact with the elder composer—hearing the *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* in 1910 with the composer present—Howells gained a profound sense of musical identity.

It was then that I felt I really knew myself, both as a man and artist. It all seemed so incredibly new at the time, but I soon came to realize how very old it actually was, how I'd been living that music since long before I could even begin to remember.<sup>54</sup>

LaPierre's list of the compositional techniques used in the *Tallis Fantasia* (as well as Vaughan Williams' choral music in general) goes a long way toward describing the essential features of Howells' musical language:

In the "Tallis Fantasia," Vaughan Williams utilized free counterpoint, false relations, and semi-tonal clashes in conjunction with twentieth-century added-note chords. In addition to these devices his choral music

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<sup>53</sup> Palmer, *A Study* 11.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. 17.

consists of mixed meters which serve to free the bar line from the accentual significance of the modern bar-line.<sup>55</sup>

The compositional procedures that came to Howells from the sixteenth-century church composers applied more readily to his choral music than his songs. Nonetheless, the music of the Tudors was central to his make-up and appeared elsewhere in his output. As he told Palmer in an interview, “All through my life I’ve had this strange feeling that I belonged somehow to the Tudor period—not only musically but every way.” It is not surprising, then, to find these elements in abundance in *Garland*. The following single example incorporates every one of the practices mentioned above with regard to Vaughan Williams’ *Tallis Fantasia*. (See Figure 2.)

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<sup>55</sup> LaPierre 30.

Figure 2. “The Song the Secret,” mm. 21-24.

The musical score for "The Song the Secret," mm. 21-24, is written in G minor (three flats) and 4/4 time. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Gone, gone Is" and continues with "beau - - - ty from me." The piano accompaniment features a "cresc." marking and a "poco f" marking. The score concludes with a "Red." marking and a star symbol.

The most indelible mark of Howells’ Tudor inheritance is his pervasive use of modes. Nearly every song in *Garland* can be said to be more modal than diatonically major or minor. The modal foundation of his melodic lines along with other features reminiscent of chant—limited vocal range, frequent changes in meter, and largely syllabic treatment of text with melismatic treatment of key words—lend an ecclesiastical, meditative atmosphere to de la Mare’s verse, whether sacred or, as is most often the case, secular. The passages below are but a few examples of this chant-like quality of Howells’ melodic writing. (See Figure 3.)



Figure 3. Chant-like Melodies.

“Song of the Secret,” mm. 18-20.



“Before Dawn,” mm. 14-18.



“King David,” mm. 3-9



On the whole, the techniques Howells gained from the Tudors were so well assimilated that they merely lent his music a timeless—some would say, deeply English—quality and did not overtly suggest the sixteenth century from which they originated. His music is clearly of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—more specifically, his senses of harmony and timbre have caused many commentators to label his music “Impressionist.” The musicologist Kenneth Long deemed Howells “the arch-priest of Impressionism in

English church music.”<sup>56</sup> Paul Spicer held that Howells’ music “is musical impressionism—very much parallel to what was being so successfully composed in France by the likes of Debussy and Ravel – or in church circles, Maurice Duruflé.”<sup>57</sup> It has also been the experience of this author in sharing the songs of *Garland* that fellow musicians choose this term as a descriptor.

The term “Impressionism” has come under fire in recent decades by some musicologists for its vagueness and historically has been objected to by so-called “Impressionists” themselves, Debussy most famously. But while the term certainly fails to comprehensively sum up any composer’s work, the persistence of the term—both in general and as a label affixed to Howells’ music—serves to draw attention to some of the most obvious features of his style. Indeed, much of Howells’ approach falls safely within popular notions of Impressionism, both with regard to aesthetic principle and stereotypical practices.

Willi Apel provides this concise definition of Impressionism in the *Harvard Dictionary of Music*:

[Impressionism is] eminently French in character: a music that hints at rather than states; in which successions of colors take the place of dynamic development, and ‘atmospheric’ sensations supersede heroic pathos[.]<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Kenneth Long, *The Music of the English Church* (New York: Martin’s, 1971) 428.

<sup>57</sup> Spicer, *Address* 4.

<sup>58</sup> Willi Apel, “Impressionism,” *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* 403.

A remarkable similarity exists between the above quote and a passage from de la Mare's essay "Rupert Brooke and the Intellectual Imagination" enlisted by Palmer to highlight the single-mindedness shared by Howells and de la Mare. In it, de la Mare contrasts the concrete quality of Brooke's approach with those of a more suggestive bent, like Howells and de la Mare himself, who seem "chiefly to mean what is left hinted at, rather than expressed [...whose world] lies like the fabric of a vision, is bathed in an unearthly atmosphere."<sup>59</sup> One need not look far into *Garland* to encounter "unearthly atmosphere" and "successions of colors." The following example (Figure 4) comes from the set's first song, "Wanderers." The various harmonies indeed form a succession rather than a progression. The F minor chord in measure 16 and the F major chord (with raised 4<sup>th</sup>) in measure 18 are not prepared but simply arrive. This lack of tonal logic elicits a floating, ungrounded quality, further enhanced by the blurring effect of the changing harmonies in measures 15 and 17.

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<sup>59</sup> Walter de la Mare, *Rupert Brooke* 196.

Figure 4. “Wanderers,” mm.14-19 (*Poco lento*), piano only.



Lest it be thought that this approach was reserved solely for the above song—which is about the planets—here is another passage that illustrates the evocative nature of Howells’ writing, in this case an eerie glimpse into the spirit world. (See Figure 5) The whole-tone parallelisms, seen localized in the right hand of measure 28 and on a larger level when comparing the two chords beginning measures 26 and 29, strongly link Howells’ procedures with those of Debussy.

Figure 5. “The Old Stone House,” mm. 26-31 (*Lento*), piano only.



As to Impressionism being “French in character,” Howells composition undoubtedly bears the imprint of England’s fascination with the vibrant musical scene in France in the early twentieth century. The work of Ravel, Satie, and *Les Six* in particular resonated with British composers in search of an aesthetic not emphasized in their training at the RCM and RAM (though not all the above were Impressionist composers). “French” sounds had found their way into Howells’ music as early as his student days at the RCM. Of his 1916 *Piano Quartet in A minor* Spicer said, “There is much of Ravel’s suave assurance in this work, and a highly impressionistic style is one of its hallmarks.”<sup>60</sup>

<sup>60</sup> Spicer, *Howells* 47.

He went on to say “many have commented on the similarity of its panache and language with Ravel’s *Piano Trio* which certainly predates the work (1914) but which Howells almost certainly had not yet heard.”<sup>61</sup>

This high absorption rate of a supposedly non-native influence begs the question of what was intrinsic to Howells’ musical make-up. The persistence throughout Howells’ career of the language first hinted at in the *Piano Quartet*, in contrast to his short-lived emulation of Bartók in the mid-20’s,<sup>62</sup> suggests that the sounds that came to him via certain French composers helped stimulate an innate aesthetic quest. They gave him a language more in line with how he wanted to express himself musically than did the Teutonic methods modeled by Stanford and Parry. This point is substantiated by the fact that the quartet was inspired by Howells’ beloved Chosen Hill,<sup>63</sup> a place that symbolized his rootedness as an Englishman. In other words, he was not aspiring towards exoticism but trying, rather, to put into sound his deep connection with an ancient collective cultural and geographical inheritance.

The quartet inspired by Chosen Hill was not the only place-specific piece Howells wrote. In fact, he asserted that he could not compose without thinking of a particular place or building. This fixation with portraying the personal sensations provoked in response to a scene or location places Howells in line with the painters for whom the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 47.

<sup>62</sup> Banfield 231.

<sup>63</sup> Chosen Hill is a geographical feature in Howells’ native Gloucester and a favorite destination for day or nighttime walks.

label of Impressionism was originally applied, including artists such as Monet, Degas, and Renoir who sought not to produce an accurate representation of what they were seeing but rather provide a visual representation of its aura, or energy. Debussy's goal was similar. As Grove's article on Impressionism states, "Debussy wanted music not merely to represent nature, but to reflect 'the mysterious correspondences between Nature and the Imagination'."<sup>64</sup>

Continuing to use the Grove article as a reputable, mainstream distillation of "Impressionism," it seems possible, to some extent, to talk not only of Impressionism as an aesthetic philosophy but of specific "Impressionistic techniques," many of which Howells utilized in *Garland*. The following passage speaks to the essence of the Impressionists' use of harmony:

In much of Debussy's music, as in Impressionist pieces by Delius, Ravel and others, the composer arrests movement on 9th and other added-note chords, not to produce dissonant tension but, as Dukas put it, to 'make multiple resonances vibrate'. This attention to distant overtones, particularly generated by gong-like lower bass notes, produces a new sense of musical space, in effect giving a greater sense of the physical reality of sound.<sup>65</sup>

In the following example from "The Old House" (Figure 6), Howells relies on the pedal along with an extreme range of notes to allow extended harmonies to fill the piano with sound.

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<sup>64</sup> Jann Pasler, "Impressionism," *Grove Music Online*, ed. Deane Root. <<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>> (Accessed 6 Jan. 2013).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

Figure 6. “The Old House,” mm. 28-36.

The musical score for "The Old House" (mm. 28-36) is presented in three systems. The first system (mm. 28-30) is in 4/4 time, marked *a tempo* and *pp*. The second system (mm. 31-33) is also in 4/4 time, marked *mf* and *poco smorzando*. The third system (mm. 34-36) is in 4/4 time, marked *poco a poco dim.*. The score features complex harmonies and a melodic line in the right hand, with a bass line in the left hand. A dashed line labeled *8va* indicates an octave shift in the right hand of the second system. The key signature is one sharp (F#).

“The Three Cherry Trees” utilizes harmonies reminiscent of Ravel, and while of a more limited range than the above example, the complexity of the chords nonetheless scatters throughout the piano a multitude of overtones. (See Figure 7.)



Figure 7. “The Three Cherry Trees,” mm. 37-41.



In both the above examples, which are far from unique, it is clear that the successions of chords do not function as traditional chord progressions but rather as sound-colors chosen and juxtaposed with the aim of striking the senses to elicit a non-intellectual response. Another hallmark of the non-functionality of Impressionistic harmony is the use of unresolved chords. About one half of the songs in *Garland* end without a strong feeling of resolution, as shown below in “Song of the Secret.” (See Figure 8.)

Figure 8. “The Song of the Secret,” mm. 42-45.



Of the three main style components of Howells' music, English folk influence is the least overt. Quotations and arrangements of folk melodies were rare in his output. He did, however, absorb folk-music into his musical vocabulary to such an extent that he could suggest indigenous idioms when he considered it appropriate. Howells felt that the pentatonic scale and the jaunty rhythms of folk-music could be used to "to put [the performers or audience] in its own genial mood."<sup>66</sup> Accordingly, the use of folk inflections in *Garland* corresponds to the only three upbeat songs: "The Old Soldier," "A Queer Story," and "Andy Battle."

The grizzled old soldier is portrayed with a rugged melody of a quasi-pentatonic nature. Though mostly in F-sharp Dorian, Howells adds a comic nuance in measure 9 by momentarily raising the third. (See Figure 9.)

Figure 9. "The Old Soldier," mm. 3-15.

Allegro ritmico: tempo giusto (♩ = 96)

Voice

There came an Old Sol-dier to my  
 door, Asked a crust, and asked no more; The wars had  
 thinned him ve-ry bare, Fight-ing and march-ing eve-ry-where,—  
 With a Fol—rol dol rol di do.

<sup>66</sup> Hodgson 160.

In “A Queer Story,” Howells uses rhythm alone to suggest a folk-music dialect. The compound meter establishes the feeling of a jig, but pitch-wise the song skirts atonality. This juxtaposition of traditional rhythm and advanced modern harmony is appropriate for de la Mare’s folk-rhyme with a twist. (See Figure 10.)

Figure 10. “A Queer Story,” mm. 31-34.

The musical score for "A Queer Story" (mm. 31-34) is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 31-32) features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in bass clef. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 6/8. The lyrics are: "Up sides and o - ver, — And round and round They". The piano part includes a crescendo hairpin and a dynamic marking of *p* (piano). The second system (mm. 33-34) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: "crossed click-clack-ing, The Parish bound. —". The piano part includes a dynamic marking of *p* and a *Red.* (Reduction) marking at the end of the system.

Finally, the story of Andy Battle, who is lost at sea, is appropriately told in a sea shanty. (See Figure 11.)

Figure 11. “Andy Battle,” mm. 4-22, voice only.

Once— and there was a young sai-lor, yeo

ho! And he sailed— out o - ver the say— For the isles where pink

co-ral and palm bran-ches blow, And the fire - flies turn night in-to day,— Yeo

ho! And the fire - flies turn night in-to day.

Aside from the above foundations to Howells' compositional style—ancient polyphony, Impressionism, and English folk idioms—the songs of *Garland* exhibit several procedures that occur with enough frequency to warrant mention here. Howells' favored techniques include holding a note in the vocal part while the harmony changes underneath, reducing suddenly from a chordal or polyphonic texture to bare octaves, and placing arabesque-like flourishes in the high register of the piano (sometimes in imitation of birdsong). Examples of these will be discussed with regard to individual songs.

The songs of *Garland* give equal satisfaction to both singer and pianist. As Palmer stated, “[Howells] was quintessentially a *vocal* composer. His music *sings*, is melodic in impulse.” The natural flow of his melodies and piquant intervallic surprises make for an engaging vocal experience. And, as will be detailed in the discussions of each song, *Garland* offers a wide spectrum of narratives, characters, and emotive states

for the singer to portray. Pianists will discover that Howells possessed an understanding of the sonic capabilities of the instrument approximately on a par with that of Debussy or Chopin. Many have commented on his taking cathedral acoustics into consideration in his choral works, without which they cannot be heard properly. Similarly, Howells' piano writing embraces and relies on the inherent nature of the piano—particularly the changes in character between different registers and, as noted above, the effect of the damper pedal. The challenge to the pianist playing this set is not one of finger technique, but rather of sensitively balancing the complex layers of timbres. This is a rewarding and pleasurable enterprise, and both singer and pianist come away from a Howells song sensitized to a world of sonic and emotional subtleties.

### *Pedagogy and Programming*

Art song, at least in the United States, is cultivated primarily in institutions of higher learning. Therefore, it may prove useful to provide some suggestions on how *Garland* could be utilized in voice studios and in recital. Despite the fact that Howells was predominantly a vocal composer, he brought sensibility to the songs that is more choral than operatic (as is common among British composers). The songs treat the voice kindly, allowing for maximum grace of poetic declamation. Never does the text or, as is so important to Howells, the mood bow to vocal display.

As a result, *Garland* is a set of highly sophisticated songs that remain within reach of the graduate level voice major (or an advanced undergraduate). Their vocal range varies from small to moderate, and the highest note in the set is an isolated high A.

Melismatic writing abounds, but none is at a speed approaching coloratura. Much of the set utilizes low or middle tessituras with high notes occurring in isolation—a useful characteristic when endeavoring to expand a young singer’s range in an appropriately challenging context. The accessibility of many of the songs in *Garland* with regard to range and tessitura must be qualified, however, by pointing out the difficulties inherent in the complexity of the music—both aurally and metrically—and in Howells’ tendency to write long phrases. *Garland* offers a gradation of difficulties in all the above respects. The following discussion, and the accompanying chart for quick reference, is meant to guide the instructor or student in finding an appropriate fit.

One finds the fewest vocal challenges in “Some One” and “The Old Stone House.” These songs’ limited ranges, combined with tessituras that lie low within that range, make them candidates for a young male singer especially. If an isolated F (above middle C) is within reach, a set could be created by adding “Andy Battle.”

The long phrases that Howells favored in his choral works also show up in *Garland*. Yet, unlike in a choral context where one can rely on strength in numbers, the student must confront the issues breath-management on his or her own. The following songs are particularly challenging, yet ultimately satisfying, in this regard: “Wanderers,” “The Lady Caroline,” “Before Dawn,” “The Three Cherry Trees,” “The Song of the Secret,” “The Old House,” and “King David.”

Aural challenges for the singer are a near ubiquitous trait of songs in *Garland*, making them useful for a student who could benefit from “ear stretching” (development of aural skill) and attractive to a musically sophisticated vocal novice. Augmented

intervals, frequent changes of mode, and dissonant clashes with the accompaniment can make the songs difficult to learn. This is an issue of particular relevance to “Wanderers,” “The Three Cherry Trees,” and “A Queer Story.” The latter two, especially, require the singer to negotiate rapidly-shifting modes comprised of complex intervals. The following chart provides an overview *Garland*’s pedagogical features as well as a quick reference for range and tessitura. (See Figure 12.) (Note: assume a span of over an octave for the “range” column, and a span of less than an octave for the “tessitura” column.)

Figure 12. Pedagogical Features of *A Garland for de la Mare*.

SONG	RANGE	TESSITURA	PEDAGOGICAL FEATURES
Wanderers	B—F	F—C#	long, legato phrases aural challenges
The Lady Caroline	D—G#	G—E b	long, legato phrases
Before Dawn	C#—F#	E—C#	long, legato phrases isolated high notes
The Old Stone House	B—E	D—A	narrow range shorter phrases, isolated high note
The Three Cherry Trees	D—G	A b —D b	long, legato phrases aural challenges
The Old Soldier	C#—F#	F#—C#	moderate phrase length isolated high notes
The Song of the Secret	C#—F#	F—C	long, legato phrases isolated high notes aural challenges
Some One	C—E	E b —B b	narrow range, short phrases isolated high note
A Queer Story	C—A	F—D#	lengthy sing requiring stamina aural challenges
Andy Battle	C—F	D—B	low tessitura, isolated high notes
The Old House	D—G#	E—D	long, legato phrases high onsets
King David	C#—F	E b —D b	long, legato phrases isolated highs

In establishing the order of the songs in *Garland* (see Figure 13), the editors of the Thames edition appear to have made certain considerations based upon the performance of the work as a whole. There is something fitting about beginning the set with the theme of the broad cosmos contained in “Wanderers.” “King David” is an understandable finale due to its popularity. The pacing of the songs varies, and similarly-themed poems are separated, for instance “The Old Stone House” and “The Old House” as well as the songs



inspired by folk idioms.<sup>67</sup> A complete performance of *Garland* lasts about forty minutes, requires at least two singers (unless transposed), preferably three.

Figure 13. Song Order in Thames Edition.

1. Wanderers
2. The Lady Caroline
3. Before Dawn
4. The Old Stone House
5. The Three Cherry Trees
6. The Old Soldier
7. The Song of the Secret
8. Some One
9. A Queer Story
10. Andy Battle
11. The Old House
12. King David

Nothing about *Garland* requires that it be performed as a whole, however. No progressive narrative binds the songs; each is a satisfying, complete experience, however brief. Given Howells' complex language and his predilection for intensely meditative moods, smaller sets of songs selected from the whole may be the best way to maximize the songs' appeal. Howells' notorious indifference towards performances of his works liberates recitalists to incorporate these songs into a program in any way they see fit. Options abound for the performer to create smaller sets from *Garland*. One option would be to assemble a set of three to five songs with a satisfying variety in mood, either solely

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<sup>67</sup> For the Chandos recording "The Old House" and "Andy Battle" are switched such that the latter, one of the few energetic pieces, ends the set. (The order of the Thames edition is otherwise observed.) This switch may have been made because the last song in the score, "King David"—arguably the high-water mark vis-à-vis Howells' and de la Mare's collaboration and the therefore a strong closer—was presented elsewhere on the CD.

from *Garland* or combined with other Howells' songs. Conversely, variety could be eschewed and a themed set created. Two such sets that could easily be extracted from *Garland* are a chilling "supernatural" group consisting of "The Old Stone House," "The Three Cherry Trees," "Some One," and "The Old House," and a "folk-rhyme" set comprised of "The Old Soldier," "A Queer Story," and "Andy Battle."

Other themed sets could be created by combining songs drawn from *Garland* with other British art songs, allowing the audience to experience Howells in reference to other British composers. For example, "Lady Caroline" could be placed alongside Quilter's "To Julia" and Finzi's "To Lizbie Brown," or "Wanderers" together with Finzi's "Comet at Yell'ham" and "The Infinite Shining Heavens." Another way to involve other composers would be to perform a set of de la Mare songs of multiple composers. The most prominent composers who set his verse are Arthur Benjamin, Gerald Finzi, Armstrong Gibbs, Ivor Gurney, and Benjamin Britten.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SONGS

#### *Songs of Individual Significance*

#### “King David”

King David was a sorrowful man:  
No cause for his sorrow had he;  
And he called for the music of a hundred harps,  
To ease his melancholy.

They played till they all fell silent:  
Played and play sweet did they;  
But the sorrow that haunted the heart of King David  
They could not charm away.

He rose; and in his garden  
Walked by the moon alone,  
A nightingale hidden in a cypress tree,  
Jargoned on and on.

King David lifted his sad eyes  
Into the dark-boughed tree  
"Tell me, thou little bird that singest,  
Who taught my grief to thee?"

But the bird in no-wise heeded;  
And the king in the cool of the moon  
Heard to the nightingale's sorrowfulness,  
Till all his own was gone.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> “King David” and each of the following poems can be found online through the public domain. The Lied, Art Song, and Choral Texts Archive (link below) features the texts for the entire work.

[http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/assemble\\_texts.html?SongCycleId=5431](http://www.recmusic.org/lieder/assemble_texts.html?SongCycleId=5431)

[Pathos is] a quality which has moved me more than any other in music—even since childhood.<sup>69</sup> –Herbert Howells

Pairing the above quote with the theme of consolation that was to become so central a feature of Howells' choral works, it is no surprise that the poem "King David" yielded his most famous and highly-regarded song. It takes as its subject a sorrowful king who suffers a grief without cause. Trying to escape his sorrow, he bids a hundred harpists to play for him, but to no avail. After rising and entering his garden, the King encounters a nightingale whose song seems to speak directly to his suffering, so much so that he asks the bird, "Who taught my grief to thee?" Oblivious to him, the bird continues to sing as the King "hearken[s] to the nightingale's sorrowfulness, 'till all his own was gone."

In "King David" one finds "the richly evocative voice, the metrical inventiveness and syntactic ingenuity, the lovely imaginative power and slightly dated locutions, the archaic charm of a world steeped in mystery" that poet Anthony Hecht felt to be at the core of de la Mare's voice.<sup>70</sup> Hold offers a trenchant description of the poem's theme, the comparative ability of Art or Nature to soothe the human spirit.<sup>71</sup> In the poem, the simple song of the nightingale, who is not in service to the king, proves superior to man-made

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<sup>69</sup> Spicer 29.

<sup>70</sup> Anthony Hecht, "Poetry: Walter de la Mare," *The Wilson Quarterly* Vol. 21, No. 3. (Summer 1997): 109.

<sup>71</sup> Hold 305.

music. However, Hold states that Howells' piece is "the perfect artifact to vie with King David's nightingale,"<sup>72</sup> highlighting the irony of a work of art that confronts this subject.

Of the song Howells said, "I am prouder to have written 'King David' than almost anything else of mine."<sup>73</sup> Undoubtedly, part of his pride consisted in de la Mare's wish that no other composer set the poem after him.<sup>74</sup> Clearly Howells regarded this song as a high water mark with regard to his de la Mare settings. Hence, his insistence that it be included in *Garland* despite it being from a vastly different style period. In comparison to the other eleven songs, "King David," while still subtle, utilizes a much more clear-cut tonal plan and harmonic vocabulary. For instance, it progresses well beyond the halfway point before using a single accidental, a characteristic not even approached by the other songs in *Garland*. From an aesthetic standpoint, "King David" could appear as an outsider. Yet clearly, musical considerations were not the only forces at work. The gesture of tribute was paramount, and in this light it is virtually inevitable that this early setting which meant so much to both Howells and de la Mare be included.

Unlike the other songs in *Garland*, there is a sizable amount of secondary literature on "King David," owing to its popularity and earlier release. The writings of Ottaway, Hold, Palmer, Banfield, and Hodgson offer unique insights along with a unified and cohesive appreciation of the song's most universally admired features.

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<sup>72</sup> Hold. 306.

<sup>73</sup> Palmer, *A Study* 16.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. 16.

Ottaway indicates his commendation of “King David” with the statement, “Few English songs of that time, apart from Warlock, can match this in sensibility and purity of expression.” He viewed the song as an important antecedent to Howells’ later style, pointing to its “vague melancholy” which in later works “sharpened and intensified into something far more urgent—an elegiac vein of considerable grandeur and ecstasy.” Viewing “King David” as a stylistic precursor to Howells’ greatest choral works sharpens the distinction between it and the de la Mare settings of the same period (*Peacock Pie*, *set I*) which were, by contrast, atypical forays into experimental regions, likely influenced by Bartók<sup>75</sup> and/or Stravinsky.<sup>76</sup> The decision to publish the works separately prevented a jarring contrast of approaches that would have detracted from both works.

Hold, who shared Ottaway’s view that “King David” was a precursor to Howells’ later style, proposed that the song has “Delian echoes” in the arabesque figures depicting the nightingale’s song. A further impression of Delius emerges through the quality of grandeur and in the sense of flow that Howells so admired in the earlier composer.<sup>77</sup> Hold’s apt use of the term “ritornello” to describe the chordal motive (Figure 14) that begins the song and reappears throughout is borrowed in the discussion below, though his suggestion that the ritornelli act as “tuning-up” chords for the harpists is a subjective interpretation likely not to resonate with every performer.

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<sup>75</sup> Banfield 231.

<sup>76</sup> Hold 300.

<sup>77</sup> Palmer, *A Study* 15.

Figure 14. “King David,” mm. 1-4.



For his part, Palmer emphasized the “motivic concentration and consequent organic unity” of “King David.”<sup>78</sup> As one example, Palmer observes, along with Ottaway, that the nightingale’s first utterance in measures 38 and 39 refers backwards (to “rose”) as well as forwards (to “moon alone”). (See Figure 15.) The ritornello, of course, plays a role in this overarching unity and its alternating thirds seem to inspire the melodic shape of the voice’s entrance. (See again Figure 14.) Further examples illustrating the song’s high-level of internal cohesion will be discussed below.

<sup>78</sup> Palmer, *A Study* 41.

Figure 15. “King David,” mm. 33-43.

The musical score for "King David" (mm. 33-43) is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "way." and "He" and the piano accompaniment with a *ppp* dynamic. The second system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "rose;" and "and in his" and the piano accompaniment with a *pp* dynamic. The third system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "gar - den Walked by the moon a-lone," and the piano accompaniment with *pp* and *mp* dynamics. The score is written in 3/2 time and features a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat).

Banfield lights on the topic of “King David” only briefly<sup>79</sup> (during a section devoted to de la Mare, not Howells) but assesses the song’s merit in a distinct way. Having just discussed the other composer closely associated with de la Mare—Armstrong Gibbs—Banfield touted the poet’s well-developed ability to relate a narrative in verse

<sup>79</sup> Banfield 226.



form, likely a byproduct of having so often written for children. While he felt Gibbs was not able to capitalize on this quality of de la Mare's verse, he held up "King David" as a shining example of Howells' ability to do so. (Gibb's little-known setting scored for mezzo soprano, female chorus, string orchestra, and piano is not mentioned.)<sup>80</sup> Using the passage in which the sorrowful King makes his way to the garden as an example, Banfield writes, "Howells knew exactly how to realize the pregnant passages in the narrative mode. [...] 'He rose' uses silence, gesture and the adoption of a new tone of voice (i.e. the modulation to E major) as evocatively as any accomplished narrator." Banfield expressed his admiration for the poem itself, saying that the archaic syntax and phrasing (e.g. "no cause for his sorrow had he" and "in no wise heeded") give the poem a "large-scale grandeur" despite it consisting of only five stanzas. This feature combined with de la Mare's musicality destined the text to become a high-impact song in the hands of the right composer.

Hodgson provides the most thorough coverage of the song, a work he felt "perhaps best typifies Howells' elegiac pathos." He described more articulately than the other commentators the subtle mood of "King David" which, by virtue of Howells' profound sympathy for the poem, avoids being mawkish or maudlin in the sorrowful portions, or gushing with shallow enthusiasm at the final resolution.

The mood of the song progresses from one of sadness to one of freedom from sadness. There is no clear evidence of elated happiness replacing the

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<sup>80</sup> Gibb's "King David" forms part of a set of 6 de la Mare verses called *In a Dream's Beguiling*, composed 1949-50.

depressed spirit, but rather a cessation of sorrow which leaves the sufferer at peace.<sup>81</sup>

Several of the above writers attribute the success of “King David” to its well-planned structure and pacing. Howells’ use of tonality, silence (absence of accompaniment), and motivic repetition are the main parameters with which he organized the song. The restrained melody for the first stanza is clearly in E-flat minor (in line with the key signature) but is subtly at odds with the ritornello’s emphasis of the submediant. (See again Figure 14.) The unresolved ninths in the piano further depict the King’s pain. The second stanza, in which the King’s harpists play—depicted by rolled chords—begins optimistically in G-flat major with a vocal line that now soars over a lushly layered accompaniment. However, as the players subside and the King still suffers, the song returns to E-flat minor. The gesture in the piano in measures 33 and 34 (see again Figure 15) again settles on A-flat minor, making it reminiscent of the opening ritornello. The tenutos link it with the beginning as well, but whereas the tenutos in the initial ritornello seemed to mire the King in his mood, here they are softened—literally with a decrescendo and by virtue of their longer duration which places the second chord on a weak beat. The unresolved ninth is absent as well. These cumulative alterations give the impression of something profoundly mystical in the air.

The modulation that begins the third stanza (cited above by Banfield) is not the intended climax of the song, though for many listeners it is the highlight. (See again Figure 15) Preceded by the chords described above, and without accompaniment for the

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<sup>81</sup> Hodgson 168.

first time, Howells has brought our full attention to the words “He rose.” The two-word phrase begins with a melodic retracing of the important tonal centers (associated with the King’s unease), E-flat, G-flat, and A-flat. However, as an indication that the mere decision to seek solace in Nature already has the King on the path towards consolation, the A-flat on “rose” transforms into a G-sharp over the new key of E major (Schubert’s and Delius’ “Eden” according to Palmer).<sup>82</sup> In this key, the ritornello sounds soft and inviting, particularly since Howells has performed a type of tonal inversion to enhance the transformation of mood. In the original E-flat minor, the ritornello utilized the harmonic sequence iv-i-iv-iv. Here, in E major the sequence becomes I-IV-I-I, imbuing a deep sense of peace and wellbeing.

The bird’s song is encountered here in the third stanza for the first time, made reverberant by the pedal. Its intervallic gestures undergo various rhythmic arrangements as well as pitch alterations that keep it within the chordal structure. However, it remains disarmingly simple and easily recognizable throughout.

As mentioned above, “King David” progresses beyond the halfway point of the song without the use of any accidentals. This stability and restraint yields an enormous impact in the fourth stanza (the only stanza that is not entirely diatonic) when the King begins his momentous encounter with the nightingale. A dynamic series of unprepared tertian modulations commence, energized by left hand arpeggios emanating from the low octaves of the piano. Starting in D major (the lowered seventh degree), the music quickly moves to B Mixolydian and then shifts to B Aeolian as the overwhelmed King asks the

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<sup>82</sup> Palmer, *Centenary Celebration* 42.

nightingale, “Who taught my grief to thee?.” This question finishes in a hopeful burst in G major, but as the question lingers unanswered the music finds its way to an E minor chord.<sup>83</sup> The potent image of the little bird not having the slightest regard for a King (“But the bird in no wise heeded”) is made more so as the accompaniment which had previously been so active drops away completely. (See Figure 16.)

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<sup>83</sup> The Thames edition has an erroneous D-sharp in m. 61, left hand, beat 2. It should be D-natural.

Figure 16. "King David," mm. 55-60.

The musical score for "King David," mm. 55-60, is presented in three systems. The key signature is E major (three sharps) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is in the upper staff, and the piano accompaniment is in the lower staves. The lyrics are: "taught my grief to thee?" and "lunga But the bird in no - wise heed-ed;". The piano part includes a harp-like texture in the right hand and a more active bass line. Dynamics include *f*, *mp*, *pp*, *dim.*, and *smorzando*. There are also markings for *lunga* and *tr* (trill).

The music for the final stanza, in which the King silently listens to the nightingale until his sorrow melts away, is a varied repetition of the second stanza (formerly in G-flat major, now in E major). The nightingale sings above and the harps are present again, perhaps now acting as accompaniment to the songbird, or as a symbol of the

reconciliation of the human and natural worlds. Another example of the motivic unity of which Palmer spoke can be found in the rising and falling motive (bracketed below), whose flexible reiteration generates much of the piano texture in these two parallel verses. The music beneath the final lines of text features this motive unwinding itself until an incomplete statement brings it to rest just before the last word. The song's peaceful conclusion consists of the ritornello; the birdsong—now in a lower, warmer register; and the above-described motive in augmentation. (See Figure 17.)

Figure 17. "King David," mm. 71-81.

The musical score is for the piece "King David" (mm. 71-81). It is written in 2/2 time and features a rising and falling motive. The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment.

**System 1 (mm. 71-72):** The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Heark - ened". The piano accompaniment features a rising and falling motive in the right hand, which is highlighted by a box labeled "Rising and falling motive".

**System 2 (mm. 73-74):** The vocal line continues with the lyrics "to the night - in - gale's sor - row - ful - ness,". The piano accompaniment includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand, both marked with a *dim.* (diminuendo) dynamic.

**System 3 (mm. 75-77):** The vocal line continues with the lyrics "Till all his own was gone." and "rall.". The piano accompaniment includes a triplet of eighth notes in the right hand and a triplet of eighth notes in the left hand, both marked with a *pp* (pianissimo) dynamic. The system concludes with a *ppp* (pianississimo) dynamic marking.

“Wanderers”

Wide are the meadows of night,  
And daisies are shining there,  
Tossing their lovely dew,  
Lustrous and fair;

And through these sweet fields go,  
Wanderers amid the stars --  
Venus, Mercury, Uranus, Neptune,  
Saturn, Jupiter, Mars.

Tired in their silver, they move,  
And circling, whisper and say,  
Fair are the blossoming meads of delight  
Through which we stray.

By flattening the night sky into a two-dimensional “meadow” through which the planets wander de la Mare exhibits the “childlike” imagination he so admired in other writers. The planets, “Tired in their silver,” attain a regal, celestial quality and seem to exist in a dream world without conflict. Their ability to communicate simply by whispering conveys something about the stillness of their surroundings as well as their imposing (if completely benign) presence.

De la Mare portrays the planets’ heavenly, contented existence on a surface level by words such as “lustrous,” “sweet,” “delight,” etc., and supported it on a deeper level by the predominance of soft consonants and the simple rhyme-scheme. The ways in which Howells reveals his sensitivity to these key words are amusing to discover. One exceptional example is the solitary chime of a single broken octave on the word “lustrous,” nearly too subtle to notice yet perfect as an audible glint of light.



Howells' fond childhood memories of midnight excursions with his father pointing out the planets may explain the appeal of this particular poem. This experience, along with his many walks to Chosen Hill, would have emblazoned in Howells' mind a clear image of a star-lit "meadow" to portray musically. He does so by striking the piano's lowest B-flat and a high B-flat octave together then filling in the middle range with a gently-moving three-note gesture, all within the unearthly Phrygian mode (B-flat Phrygian). (See Figure 18.)

Figure 18. "Wanderers," mm. 1-6.

*Poco lento, tranquillo e lontano*

*pp*

Voice

Piano

8<sup>va</sup>—

8

Wide

are the mea-dows of night, And dai -

8

“Wanderers” is the only song in *Garland* for which Howells used an ostinato, despite it being a favored device in his earlier song-writing (as in the songs of *Peacock Pie*, and the individual songs “O my Deir Heart” and “Goddess of Night”). Its use here feels appropriate as a suggestion of the universe’s undying rhythm. The wide-spread unison pedal tone and blurry dissonances within suggest eternity and vast distance.

Aesthetically, “Wanderers” falls squarely within Howells’ “mystical (remote)” style.<sup>84</sup> (The music alone convinces us of this but, additionally, we find the Italian word for “remote,” *lontano*, in the tempo indication.) The voice itself sounds suspended and far-off upon as it enters with the first phrase, “Wide are the meadows of night.” Undoubtedly, the *pp* dynamic contributes to this floating, ethereal effect, but so does, in more subtle ways, the first note’s placement on a weak beat in the measure—beat five in 6/4 time—and Howells’ careful avoidance of the singer’s first pitch in the piano ostinato in measures 1 and 2. (See again Figure 18.)

As “Wanderers” continues, Howells admirably invokes the feeling of limitless space while avoiding nebulous monotony. Most importantly, he allows the ostinato to vary, both metrically and in its progression through a series of modes that yield complex, other-worldly effects. While these rare harmonies are striking, the magic is in their juxtaposition. The shifts are unexpected yet not jarring—an apt depiction of wonder. One particularly colorful passage was referenced earlier in the discussion of Howells’ Impressionistic qualities (see page 38, Figure 4.)

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<sup>84</sup> Hodgson 167. Hodgson identifies three main moods found in Howells’ music: elegiac, mystical (remote), and somberly gay.

Howells also maintains interest by changing focus from wide and all-encompassing at the beginning down to the specific, when each of the planets is named. As the song begins, long vocal phrases promote a protracted sense of time and space. The text is lengthened by frequent notes of several beats' duration and by luxurious melismatic writing. However, as the poem delivers its central image—the planets as “Wanderers amid the stars”—the notes quicken to no longer than a dotted eighth, drawing our attention to this important phrase. (See Figure 19.)

Figure 19. “Wanderers,” mm. 14-19, voice only.



A shift in the piano writing prepares us for the roll call of planets that follows—an encapsulation in miniature of Holst’s famous orchestral suite “The Planets.” The haze of long pedal tones dissipates and the compass of the piano scoring is drastically reduced. A quicker harmonic rhythm and more frequent pedal changes underlie the imaginatively varied melodic treatment each planet receives. (See Figure 20.)

Figure 20. "Wanderers," mm. 21-26.

Ve - nus, Mer - cu - ry,

U - ra - nus, Nep - tune, Sa - turn, Ju - pi - ter and Ju - pi - ter,

Mars.

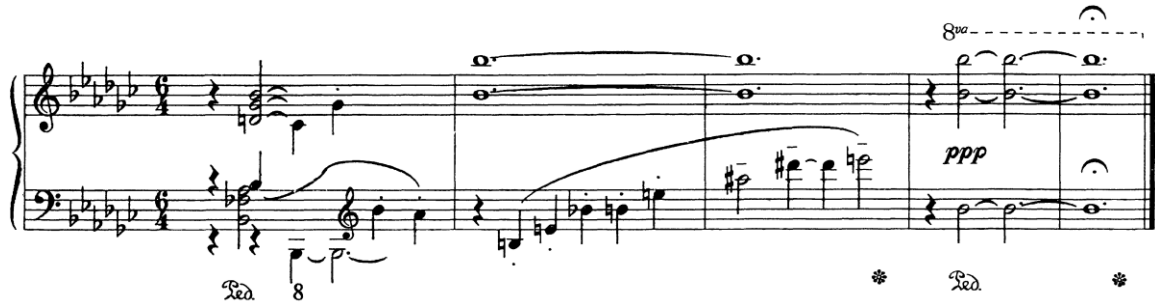
*mf*

*smorzando*

2<sup>da</sup>

The song dissolves into silence twice: once after the second stanza and again after the third and final stanza. In both passages an arpeggio emphasizing flat 2<sup>nd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> scale degrees creates a cosmic atmosphere. (See Figure 21.)

Figure 21. “Wanderers,” mm. 36-40, piano only.



“The Lady Caroline” (“Lovelocks”)

I watched the Lady Caroline  
Bind up her dark and beauteous hair;  
Her face was rosy in the glass,  
And 'twixt the coils her hand would pass,  
White in the candleshine.

Her bottles on the table lay,  
Stoppered, yet sweet of violet;  
Her image in the mirror stooped  
To view those locks as lightly looped  
As cherry-boughs in May.

The snowy night lay dim without,  
I heard the Waits their sweet song sing;  
The window smouldered keen with frost;  
Yet still she twisted, sleeked and tossed  
Her beauteous hair about.

A poem about a woman dressing her hair at the mirror could seem like a peculiar inclusion in a collection of children’s poetry, illustrating Loges’ assertion that de la Mare’s success as a children’s writer owes to his not being “constrained by the genre.” The poem’s occasionally sensual imagery is unexpected as well: “The window smouldered keen with frost; yet still she twisted, sleeked and tossed her beauteous hair

about.” The language is certainly not explicit enough to support an accusation that de la Mare was being inappropriately adult or aiming to titillate young readers. Nonetheless, de la Mare would have no objections were this poem to provide a medium for children to begin acknowledging their inchoate notions of beauty and attraction. Though de la Mare held a largely critical attitude towards Freud,<sup>85</sup> he shared Freud’s view that the child was “born whole;” and that included their latent sexuality.<sup>86</sup>

If de la Mare’s intent regarding sexuality remains unclear, so does the eponymous subject of the poem. Perhaps she is Lady Caroline Lamb (1785-1828), the aristocrat famous as much for her affair with Lord Byron as for her novels. Regardless, the designation “Lady” signifies royal blood, adding delicacy to her appeal and a presumed reverence on the part of her admirer. The idea of using a courtly dance to portray Lady Caroline’s nobility seemed to come to Howells early. In the first known mention of the song, a journal entry from January 1936, he wrote, “I worked awhile at *The Lady Caroline* wondering if it wd. [sic] be of the “Gavotte” family,”<sup>87</sup> referring to his then well-known 1919 setting of Henry Newbolt’s poem by that title. His initial inspiration held, though for the new song the dance would be a minuet. Like “Gavotte” and “The Three Cherry Trees” (another song in *Garland* which uses a siciliana), “Lady Caroline” pairs the vocal part with a dance accompaniment so independent as to be, in essence, a

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<sup>85</sup> McCrosson 21.

<sup>86</sup> Loges 209.

<sup>87</sup> Palmer, *Centenary Celebration* 485.

piano solo. In this respect, these songs resemble Denis Browne's "To Gratiana dancing and singing,"<sup>88</sup> composed in 1913—a song Howells listed among his favorites.<sup>89</sup>

Although all three of Howells' songs share the technique of Browne's ode, "Lady Caroline" most closely evokes the warm spirit of surrender encountered in "Gratiana" (with which it shares the key of G major). Howells' ballade grows more complex and ornate than Browne's strophic setting but begins with the same unguarded simplicity, employing a similarly rhapsodic use of both melismas and triplets against a duple meter. (See Figures 22 and 23.)

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<sup>88</sup> Browne's "Gratiana" uses text by English poet Richard Lovelace (1618-1657/58) and a melody adapted from an Elizabethan song.

<sup>89</sup> Hold 298 and Banfield 154.

Figure 22. Denis Browne “To Gratiana singing and dancing,” mm. 1-8.

**Moderato con moto** M.M. ♩ = 60  
*L.H. (lontano)*

PIANO

*Suono ed un poco forte*

5 *mf* 3 3 3

See — with what con-stant mo - - tion,

E - ven and glorious as the sun,



Figure 23. “The Lady Caroline,” mm. 1-8.

Poco con rubato: ma dolce e teneramente (♩ = c. 72)

*mf*

Voice

I watched the

Piano

*p*

*simile*

La - - - dy - Ca-ro-line

Two readily apparent additional similarities exist between “The Lady Caroline” and Browne’s “Gratiana.” First, the chord voicings below (in Figure 24) show a marked resemblance to the lush voicings of Browne’s shown above. Secondly, both songs feature a caesura before their final sections. In each case, the resulting silence allows a grand climactic section to dissipate and prepares the tenderest portion of the song. (See the last example in this discussion.)

Figure 24. “The Lady Caroline,” mm. 57-58, piano only.



In creating a song in the likeness of Browne’s ode, Howells indulges in a rhapsodic outpouring and subjective tenderness uncommon in his work, placing “Lady Caroline” in a unique position with regard to the other songs in *Garland*. Much of the set features either a mystical beauty reminiscent of his church music, the eeriness of the spirit world, or the jocularity of the English folk idiom, all of which accomplish their aim while maintaining a personal detachment. In this song, however, it seems as if Howells was seduced into writing a more intimate, sentimental, and sensual setting than he usually permitted himself. By broadening the set’s emotional range, “Lady Caroline” occupies a vital place within the whole.

This conspicuous departure from the tone Howells used for the rest of *Garland* compels anyone familiar with his life to recollect the intensity of his attraction to women. Howells’ marriage was, for the most part, loving and contented. However, as Palmer observed, “Howells was drawn to women, and they to him.” Frequently the lure of other women became irresistible, and he engaged in at least four lengthy extramarital affairs during his lifetime. Howells’ musical surrender to de la Mare’s Lady Caroline mimics his practice in life.

If de la Mare strayed from his marriage, biographical accounts are not enumerated. (Palmer and Spicer were quite candid on the topic of Howells' infidelity.) His writing did, however, express a fascination with what he termed the "Impossible She."<sup>90</sup> This archetype who appeared regularly in his novels and poems embodies extreme beauty—"A beauty beyond earth's content,/ A hope—half memory."<sup>91</sup> She is elusive, immortal, unchanging, and dangerous owing to the aching discontent she engenders. Above all, she captivates by remaining unattainable. One of the main features of the song mentioned earlier—its stand-alone piano part—takes on significance vis-à-vis this "Impossible She." The independence of the piano part establishes the impression of a distance between Lady Caroline (represented by a minuet) and her beholder. Perhaps most telling is the way in which her activity continues unperturbed as the singer enters. (See again Figure 23.) The narrator seems destined throughout to remain merely an admiring onlooker.

In contrast to the Richard Lovelace<sup>92</sup> text used by Browne which invokes "the spheres" and Apollo in his praise of Gratiana, de la Mare's portrait is more mundane. Rather than lofty, universal praise, it is the specifics of the scene (e.g., her stoppered perfume bottles which nonetheless give off an appealing aroma) that captivate. Either due to the difference in the poems or in Howells' musical proclivities, his setting is more picturesque than Browne's. The vivid images supplied by de la Mare yield an array of

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<sup>90</sup> McCrosson 60.

<sup>91</sup> Walter de la Mare, "Vain Finding," quoted in McCrosson 60.

<sup>92</sup> Richard Lovelace—English poet (1618-1657).

musical responses. For example, the complex texture of Lady Caroline's curled hair is aptly depicted by the two-part writing in the right hand of the piano part above the left hand hemiola (a common feature throughout). (See Figure 25.) The nuance of a single ornament in this passage typifies Howells' fine-brushstroke approach and invokes the ornamental style associated with the archaic minuet. On the line, "Her image in the mirror stooped to view those locks as lightly looped as cherry boughs," the rapid flourishes conjure an image that is indeed ravishing. (See Figure 26.)

Figure 25. "Lady Caroline," mm. 17-20.

This musical score shows measures 17-20 of the piece "Lady Caroline". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and includes the lyrics "And 'twixt the coils her hands would pass,". A *rit.* (ritardando) marking is placed over the final notes of the vocal phrase. The piano accompaniment is written in two staves. The right hand features a complex texture with two-part writing, while the left hand plays a hemiola pattern. The tempo/mood is marked *teneramente* (tenderly) and *colla voce* (in time with the voice).

Figure 26. "Lady Caroline," mm. 32-35.

This musical score shows measures 32-35 of the piece "Lady Caroline". It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Her i - mage in the mir - - - - - ror". The piano accompaniment is written in two staves. The right hand features a complex texture with two-part writing, while the left hand plays a hemiola pattern. The tempo/mood is marked *poco cresc.* (poco crescendo).

The high point of the song comes as the poem juxtaposes the candlelit woman and the carolers (‘waits’) outside in the frosty winter night. Howells’ writing acquires a rhapsodic quality not approached elsewhere in *Garland*, as both voice and piano soar to their greatest heights. The original theme which began with chaste nobility takes on an unabashedly romantic exuberance. (See Figure 27.)

Figure 27. “Lady Caroline,” mm. 55-59.

The musical score for "Lady Caroline" (mm. 55-59) is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line (treble clef) and piano accompaniment (grand staff). The vocal line starts with a forte (*f*) dynamic and includes the lyrics "sing," and "their". The piano accompaniment features arpeggiated chords and triplet figures. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "sweet" and "song", and the piano accompaniment. The piece concludes with a ritardando (*rit.*) marking.

Harmonies of an undeniably sensual nature underlie the end of the poem as the poet’s gaze lingers on Lady Caroline (See Figure 28.) Howells’ impeccable taste spares the chords from sounding hackneyed or overly sentimental—the fate suffered by similar passages in parlor room ballades. A particularly captivating moment occurs as the A-

minor 7<sup>th</sup> chord below the word “tossed” changes a B-flat 13<sup>th</sup> with a sharp 11<sup>th</sup> (m. 71).

The vocal line passes delicately through the salient tones of its exotic second chord (the 13<sup>th</sup>, sharp 11<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup>), painting a picture of Lady Caroline’s “beauteous hair.”

Figure 28. “The Lady Caroline,” mm. 65-72.

*meno mosso, semplice mp*

The win - dow smoul - dered keen with frost; Yet still she

*meno mosso, semplice pp*

*rall.*

twis - ted, sleeked and tossed her beau - teous hair

*rall. mp*

*pp*

a - bout.

A final repeat of the opening theme played by the piano in *più lento* draws the song tenderly to a close.

“Before Dawn”<sup>93</sup>

Dim-berried is the mistletoe  
With globes of sheenless grey,  
The holly mid ten thousand thorns  
Smoulders its fires away;  
And in the manger Jesus sleeps  
This Christmas Day.

Bull unto bull with hollow throat  
Makes echo every hill,  
Cold sheep in pastures thick with snow  
The air with bleating fill;  
While of his mother's heart this Babe  
Takes His sweet will.

All flowers and butterflies lie hid,  
The blackbird and the thrush  
Pipe but a little as they flit  
Restless from bush to bush  
Even to the robin Gabriel hath  
Cried softly "Hush!"

Now night's astir with burning stars  
In darkness of the snow;  
Burdened with frankincense and myrrh  
And gold the Strangers go  
Into a dusk where one dim lamp  
Burns softly, lo!

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<sup>93</sup> The Thames edition supplies two complete versions of “Before Dawn.” This discussion pertains to version 1 which is more often heard.

No snowdrop yet its small head nods  
In winds of winter drear;  
No lark at casement in the sky  
Sings matins shrill and clear;  
Yet in this frozen mirk the Dawn  
Breathes, Spring is here!

In “Before Dawn,” de la Mare’s and Howells’ shared penchant for evoking past eras works in tandem to create one of the most powerful songs in *Garland*. The biblical theme of the poem (Christ’s nativity) links it with “King David.” Perhaps not surprisingly, the grandeur of “King David” finds its only equal within *Garland* in the triumphant conclusion of “Before Dawn.” Though short-lived, it is surely one of the most luminous moments in all of Howells’ writing.

De la Mare’s clear suggestion of antiquity through the use of *Jesu*—the medieval form of Jesus—and the archaic *lo* must have struck Howells as a welcome invitation to transport himself (and us) to the musical era with which he most strongly self-identified—that of the Tudors. Even before the singer enters with the first words of the hymn-like poem, Howells creates a vivid depiction of this time period in the introduction. Most often, Howells’ sixteenth-century sensibility is absorbed into a language that is obviously of the twentieth century. His music is, in other words, frequently redolent of that earlier era but could not have been written by a person who lived at that time. The first two measures of “Before Dawn,” on the other hand, sound as though they are lifted directly from a sixteenth century score. (See Figure 29.) The unresolved 9<sup>th</sup> in measure four provides the first hint of the song’s general progression toward a more twentieth-century style of writing. Nevertheless, Howells retains vestiges of antiquity throughout,



using chant-like melodies and pervasive metrical asymmetry (seen in many of the figures below) as well as several Renaissance-sounding cadences (one of which is seen below in Figure 30).

Figure 29. “Before Dawn,” mm. 1-4.



Howells' reference to the medieval period in "Before Dawn" is so overt as to form a striking parallel to the painters and sculptors of the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood. In fact, in many ways, the work of the Pre-Raphaelites provides an apt frame of reference for other Howells' pieces: certainly his works for clavichord, in which he applied his great familiarity of the instrument's original repertoire; his plainchant-influenced choral works; and, in *Garland*, "Before Dawn" and "King David." The rejection of contemporary trends in favor of certain tenets of medieval painting by artists such as William Holman Hunt (1827-1910), John Everett Millais (1829-1896), and Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828-1882) can be compared to the resurgence of ancient Anglican Church polyphony by composers of the English Musical Renaissance and their shunning of continental Romanticism. Along with Vaughan Williams, Holst, and Peter Warlock, Howells took this reform very much to heart.

The primary point of connection between Howells and the Pre-Raphaelites is a fascination with medieval culture and the creation of works that were modern but bore a strong resemblance that earlier era. As ancient and culturally-significant narratives, “Before Dawn” and “King David” exhibit rather specific parallels with the Pre-Raphaelites’ “history paintings” such as Hunt’s “Finding the Savior at the Temple” or Millais’ “Jephtha.” Howells and these painters also shared a reverence for craftsmanship and nature observation. Howells’ exacting work with Stanford, which according to Howells made it impossible to be “a wobbler, a neutral, a befogged practitioner” instilled in him the first ideal, and the time spent among his outdoor surroundings had an immense impact on Howells’ composition, leading Hodgson to term him “a Nature poet gone to church.” “Before Dawn” relies heavily on nature imagery—holly and mistletoe, pastoral animals, birds, the night sky, wind, and snow. Even the song’s most notable feature, its triumphant conclusion, relies on the natural phenomenon of the return of spring.

This climactic ending, while spectacular enough in isolation, owes much of its power to the protracted sense of desolation which precedes it. Especially at the song’s beginning, Howells suspends the sense of progression by setting the first two stanzas in a quasi-strophic manner. Additionally, the text declamation is made sparse by the intervening mood responses in the piano of a free contrapuntal nature or Howells’ favored solitary octaves. This unhurried advancement and somber affect mimics the experience of enduring a bleak winter. Howells musically accentuates the solemn, muted beauty found in de la Mare’s words, especially when the dormant holly and mistletoe (features of an English rather than Middle-Eastern winter, admittedly), animals in snowy

pastures, and foraging birds are contrasted with the comforting image of Jesus and Mary inside the manger—a characteristic example of Howells’ trademark neo-Renaissance cadences.<sup>94</sup> (See Figure 30.)

Figure 30. “Before Dawn,” mm. 25-33.

The musical score for "Before Dawn" (mm. 25-33) is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal entry with the lyrics "Cold sheep in" and a piano accompaniment marked *mf* and *poco cresc.*. The second system continues the vocal line with lyrics "pas-tures thick with snow The air with blea-tings fill; While of his mo - ther's heart—" and includes piano accompaniment with markings *poco f*, *mf espressivo*, and *poch.*. The third system concludes the phrase with lyrics "— this Babe— Takes — his sweet—will." and features tempo markings *poco rit.* and *a tempo* for both vocal and piano parts, with a piano dynamic *p* in the final piano measure.

<sup>94</sup> For more about Howells’ cadences, see further Palmer *Centenary Celebration* pages 192-193 and page 399.

At the midpoint of the song, Howells finds various ways to begin propelling the song from its somber state toward its radiant conclusion. The long pedal tones that underlie the poem's third stanza, about the travelling wise men, create for the first time an air of expectancy. The musical depiction of these wanderers beneath the night sky is strikingly similar to that of "Wanderers," the first song in *Garland*—enough so to cause one to wonder if Howells was intentionally drawing a parallel. Note the wide-spread octaves combined with gently moving inner voices to create a vast, mystical, feeling of openness and wonder. (See Figure 31.)

Figure 31. “Before Dawn,” mm. 48-53.

The musical score for "Before Dawn," mm. 48-53, is written in 3/4 time and D major. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic and includes the lyrics "Now night's a-stir with bur - ning stars". The piano accompaniment includes a crescendo (*cresc. un poco*) and a mezzo-forte (*mf*) dynamic. The score is divided into three systems: the first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment; the second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment; the third system shows the piano accompaniment.

The final stanza of the poem, and Howells' setting of it, achieves its unique impact by embracing both the great and the small. It begins with a focus brought down to a single snowflake: "Lo! No snow-drop yet its small head nods, in winds of winter drear." High-registered eighth-notes marked *transparente* depict a snowflake's intricacy and chill. (See Figure 32.)

Figure 32. "Before Dawn," mm. 65-69.

The musical score for "Before Dawn," mm. 65-69, is written in G major (three sharps) and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Lo! No snow-drop yet its small head nods," and continues with "In winds of win-ter drear;". The piano accompaniment features several markings: "a tempo (ma con moto)" at the beginning, "p" (piano) for the first vocal phrase, "transparente" for the piano's melodic line, and "poch." (poco) for the second vocal phrase. The score shows a key change from G major to F major at the end of the passage.

Yet despite the snow not yet melting, and no sign of the lark, a mildness seems present in the dawn air which joins with the hopeful birth of Jesus to give rise to the exclamation, "Spring is here!," an exultation which seems to resound throughout creation. Musically, this final outburst is as surprising (given the overall restraint of the song) as it is effective. It is preceded by an E7 pedal which, as it progresses to the final phrase gets progressively more impregnated with added tones. This passage's resemblance to clanging bells betrays Howells' many years amid England's great cathedrals. On the word "Here!" the E7 resolves to the unexpected but radiant key of F-

sharp major and an ecstatic restatement of the opening motive far removed from the chilly austerity of its initial appearance. (See Figure 33.)

Figure 33. “Before Dawn,” mm. 80-88.

The musical score for "Before Dawn," mm. 80-88, is written in A major (three sharps) and 7/8 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a rest, followed by the lyrics "Spring is here!". The piano accompaniment features a variety of dynamic markings: *f* (forte), *non troppo* (not too much), *f (ma dolce)* (forte but sweet), *mf* (mezzo-forte), *p* (piano), *mp* (mezzo-piano), *mpp* (mezzo-pianissimo), and *pp* (pianissimo). The tempo is marked *lento* (slow). The score includes a variety of musical notations, including eighth notes, quarter notes, and half notes, as well as rests and accidentals.

“The Three Cherry Trees”

There were three cherry trees once,  
Grew in a garden all shady;  
And there for delight of so gladsome a sight,  
Walked a most beautiful lady,  
Dreamed a most beautiful lady.

Birds in those branches did sing,  
Blackbird and throstle and linnet,  
But she walking there was by far the most fair --  
Lovelier than all else within it,  
Blackbird and throstle and linnet.

But blossoms to berries do come,  
All hanging on stalks light and slender,  
And one long summer's day charmed that lady away,  
With vows sweet and merry and tender;  
A lover with voice low and tender.

Moss and lichen the green branches deck;  
Weeds nod in its paths green and shady:  
Yet a light footstep seems there to wander in dreams,  
The ghost of that beautiful lady,  
That happy and beautiful lady.

This poem about a woman whose ghost often returns to a favored garden reflects de la Mare's belief that places can retain a type of spiritual occupancy. It also attests to his view that while dreaming one's soul is free to travel beyond the limits of one's body (“Yet a light foot-step seems there to wander in dreams”). We get the sense that in actuality this woman never again visits the garden (which is now overgrown with weeds). She has been “charmed away” by a “lover with voice low and tender.”

The woman's current situation is left inexplicit. The poem gives no indication that it is a negative existence. However, her need to return to the garden where her spirit can



wander happily indicates that in her “real” life she feels cut off from the existence the garden represents—she has lost access to something precious to her. In a metaphorical reading of this poem, the lover fructifies the lady (“blossoms to berries”) making it impossible for her to return to her earlier state of youth, pristine beauty, and innocence. The common use of cherry trees as symbols of rebirth and new awakenings supports the conception of this poem as a melancholy look back at the irretrievable past.

Howells’ penchant for creating dream-like atmospheres through music must have made this poem enticing to him. Mood was of critical importance to Howells and this poem strikes a beautifully complex one. Though the text begins as an idyllic, almost folk-style ode to a lovely woman, her ghostly appearance in the last half of the last stanza adds a layer of eerie intrigue. This otherworldly component, encountered towards the end of the poem, is apparent from the start of Howells’ setting. As with “The Lady Caroline,” he creates an accompaniment that is nearly self-sufficient, forming a full-fledged depiction of the woman that exists apart from the singer. Also, as in “The Lady Caroline,” Howells utilizes a centuries-old dance form, in this case a siciliana.

The introduction establishes an A-flat minor tonality despite the A-flat major key signature. Lengthy pedal indications allow the raised fourth degree and the F-flat diminished chord to assemble into a haze of dissonance above the A-flat root. The piano also foreshadows the oscillation between B-flat and C-flat which moments later gives the vocal line its eeriness. The voice emerges out of this blurry accompaniment, much like the apparition herself, often returning to B-flat—an unresolved ninth against the bass. This softly-dissonant ninth, also used in the opening chords of “King David” and just

prior to the voice's entrance in "Before Dawn," is a favored harmonic color of Howells in the minor mode. Whereas in "King David" it conveys a sense of grief, here, as in "Before Dawn," it creates the feeling of discontent. (See Figure 34.)

Figure 34. "The Three Cherry Trees," mm. 1-5.

Come una Siciliana; teneramente, ma con moto (♩ = c. 48-50)

Voice

Piano

*pp* *mf* *mp*

There were three cher-ry trees once, — Grew in a gar-den all sha - dy;—

Hold wittily suggests that, in addition to the young woman's ghost, the ghost of Ravel also "hovers amongst"<sup>95</sup> this setting, a thought echoed by Palmer in his brief discussion of the song.<sup>96</sup> They were likely referring to the kinship of harmonic language

<sup>95</sup> Hold 302.

<sup>96</sup> Palmer, *Centenary Celebration* 155.

(and, by extension, their similar treatment of dissonance) as well as the act of reviving a Baroque dance form in a manner both modern and highly disciplined. The frequent arpeggiations, such as the one which begins the piece, are very comparable to those found in other piano works by Ravel. Additionally, the song also bears a striking resemblance to Ravel's "Forlane" from *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (see Figure 35). "The Three Cherry Trees" feels very much like an eerie, more lyrical, subjective variation on Ravel's piano piece. The use of the minor mode with a raised fourth as well as the disjunct intervallic motion in which the melodic lines seem to seek out dissonance is very much of the same sensibility.

Figure 35. Ravel, "Forlane," mm. 1-4.



"The Three Cherry Trees" lacks the strict adherence to Baroque form found in Ravel's "Forlane." Nevertheless, the song utilizes the custom of embellished repetition associated with the Baroque era.<sup>97</sup> The first two stanzas, which function as the poem's exposition, are sung over the same harmonic progression, with each inserting one 6/8 bar in the corresponding position within the prevailing 9/8 meter. Enough of the melody

<sup>97</sup> Admittedly, Howells varies repeated material in other songs of *Garland*: "Before Dawn," "Andy Battle," and "The Old Soldier," for example. Thus, he may not have intended a specific reference to the Baroque period here.

remains the same in the second stanza for it to be recognized as a repetition, yet Howells enlivens the setting with seemingly spontaneous alterations in melodic contour in response to the words. (See Figure 36.) Howells varies the accompaniment to the second stanza as well, most notably with rapid figures depicting the songbirds that light in the trees. (See Figure 37.)

Figure 36. “The Three Cherry Trees.”

First stanza, voice only.

The musical score is written on four staves. The first staff begins with a treble clef, a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and a 9/8 time signature. It starts with a mezzo-piano (*mp*) dynamic marking. The melody consists of eighth and quarter notes. The lyrics 'There were three cher-ry trees once, Grew in a gar-den all sha - dy;' are written below the staff. The second staff continues the melody with a crescendo hairpin, followed by the lyrics '— And there for de-light of so glad-some a sight, — Walked a most'. The third staff features a decrescendo hairpin and a *poco* marking, with the lyrics 'beau - ti - ful la - dy, — Dreamed a most beau-ti - ful la - dy. —'. The fourth staff begins with a *poco rit.* marking and shows the melody slowing down with a dashed line indicating a fermata or a long note.

*mp*

There were three cher-ry trees once, Grew in a gar-den all sha - dy;—

— And there for de-light of so glad-some a sight, — Walked a most

beau - ti - ful la - dy, — Dreamed a most beau-ti - ful la - dy. —

*poco rit.*

Second stanza, voice only.

*mp dolce: teneramente*

Birds in those bran-ches did sing, Black-bird and thros - tle and lin-net,

But she walk - ing there was by far the most fair- Love -

- lier than all else with-in it, Black-bird and thros - tle and lin-net.

Figure 37. “The Three Cherry Trees,” mm. 15-16, piano only.

*mp dolce: teneramente*

Birds in those bran-ches did sing, Black-bird and thros - tle and lin-net,

But she walk - ing there was by far the most fair- Love -

- lier than all else with-in it, Black-bird and thros - tle and lin-net.

Even given the eerie and unsettled quality of the first half of the song, a stasis is nonetheless achieved by the (varied) strophic setting and tonal stability. By contrast, the developments in the final two stanzas of the poem—the woman being wooed by her lover and her return to the garden in dreams—find support in a treatment that is more through-composed and tonally ambiguous. This eventful shift is marked by a change in key

signature from A-flat to F-sharp, though a series of tonal excursions move the song quickly from that new tonic. Unprepared harmonic shifts to distant chords perpetuate the otherworldly environment, but when the ghost of the young woman appears in the last half of the last stanza the harmonies shift subtly toward a more tender and nostalgic mood. The vocal line receives its most melismatic writing here. (See Figure 38.)

Figure 38. “The Three Cherry Trees,” mm. 42-50.

The musical score for "The Three Cherry Trees" (mm. 42-50) is presented in three systems. The key signature is G major (one sharp) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is written in a soprano or alto clef, and the piano accompaniment is in a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are: "Yet a light foot-step seems there to wan - der in dreams, — The ghost of that beau - ti-ful la - dy, — That hap - py and beau - ti-ful la - dy." The score includes dynamic markings (*p*, *pp*, *mp*), articulation (accents), and performance instructions (*estinto*, *rit.*). The piano part features a prominent bass line in the left hand and a more active melody in the right hand. The vocal line is characterized by long, flowing phrases with many ties.

As the poem concludes, a short postlude commences in the major key of the original tonic. This ray of light at the end suggests that in dreaming the woman has found peaceful resolution. While a sensitive listener might appreciate the significance of the return to the starting key, now in major, they would remain unaware of several puzzling aspects of Howells’ notation—aspects that seem intended to have meaning beyond the

song's sonic dimension. "The Three Cherry Trees" begins in the key signature of A-flat major. However, the entire time that key signature is in effect, every C is flat, causing each of the many A-flat chords to be, in fact, minor. Indeed, nowhere does an A-flat major chord appear until the last four bars of the song where, strangely, it is notated as G-sharp major above an F-sharp minor (or A major) key signature. The many accidentals required in the final bars makes one wonder why Howells did not simply return to the original key signature of A-flat. This surely would have facilitated issues of notation. It seems most likely that Howells was deliberately using notation to encode the music with symbolic significance.

In the absence of the composer's specific thoughts on this unorthodox choice, it remains for imaginative interpreters to decide for themselves what, if anything, this notation might be signifying. Perhaps in writing minor music over a major key signature for the first two stanzas Howells meant to convey the discontent of the lady—her longing for a time in her life forever gone, along with her lost innocence. The unsettled quality heard at the opening is accentuated (if only for those knowledgeable of the score) by the conflict seen on the page. As stated above, the arrival at the tonic implied by the opening key signature may signify the peace of returning to a once-cherished location, especially after the harmonic travel of the second half of the poem. However, by eschewing the original key signature of A-flat and choosing instead the enharmonic spelling, Howells may be suggesting the happiness this lady's ghost has found by returning to the garden is of a less tangible nature.



This device is apparent in the final phrase of the vocal line as well. The temporary return to flatted notes—which in measures 48 and 49 would have matched the piano better if notated in sharps—allows the melody to settle on A-flat during the last word “lady.” What need would Howells have had to change the very last sung note from A-flat to G-sharp, if not to indicate something of consequence, perhaps the failure to hold on to something yearned for but not fully attained? (See again Figure 38.)

If the above gesture is perceived only by one privy to the written score, the unreality of the woman’s happiness receives clear audible representation in the prelude. It begins and ends with the song’s only major chords built on the original tonic (A-flat/G-sharp). However, a doleful utterance between these chords (starting in measure 52) threatens to dismantle G-sharp as the tonic. Given that the low G-sharp struck in measure 51 is sustained by the pedal, the phrase beginning in measure 52 can be understood as Lydian inflections. However, the perfect fifth between B-sharp and F-double sharp and the right hand emphasis of B-sharp itself—most notably the B-sharp that remains unaccompanied in measure at the beginning of 53—begin to establish a new tonic of B-sharp Aeolian. When the final G-sharp chord is struck beneath this decaying B-sharp, it sounds profoundly altered from the chord two measures earlier with the same root. The weakening of the final chord suggests the way a dream—which a moment ago was so vivid and all-encompassing—fades rapidly upon waking. (See Figure 39.)

Figure 39. “The Three Cherry Trees,” mm. 51-54, piano only.

G-Sharp major 7th

B-sharp Aeolian

G-sharp major

*meno mosso rit. e dim.*

*p*

*ppp*

Red.

\*

Red.

\*

### “The Song of the Secret”

Where is beauty?  
 Gone, gone:  
 The cold winds have taken it  
 With their faint moan;  
 The white stars have shaken it,  
 Trembling down,  
 Into the pathless deeps of the sea.  
 Gone, gone  
 Is beauty from me.

The clear naked flower  
 Is faded and dead;  
 The green-leafed willow,  
 Drooping her head,  
 Whispers low to the shade  
 Of her boughs in the stream,  
 Sighing a beauty,  
 Secret as dream.

As discussed above, de la Mare distinguished himself as a children’s author by exploring a wide spectrum of feeling and experience, even those of a dark nature. “The Song of the Secret” shares with “King David” the theme of inward emotive life and

sadness of a vague, undefinable quality. By comparison, “The Song of the Secret” strikes a less narrative tone, and by virtue of being in the first person occupies a more personal sphere. It also lacks the clear resolution of King David, leaving the reader to savor its ennui.

The phrases “the cold winds have taken [beauty] with their faint moan” and “the white stars have shaken it, trembling down into the pathless deeps of the sea” function in a symbolist mode, allowing for highly personal interpretations on the part of the reader, singer, or audience member. These images defy literal meaning but are not so obtuse as to be inaccessible even on a first hearing. The pictures of the sea and a willow drooping her head to the stream, “sighing a beauty secret as a dream,” conjures associations with the mysterious depths of the subconscious. It suggests we carry notions of beauty and of the ideal deep within us, in a secret realm, unknown to others. It also suggests that perhaps the primary way we form these notions is through loss.

Howells’ innate disposition was well suited to express the emotional depth of this text. The ability to summon an atmosphere of “intense meditation and spirituality”<sup>98</sup> that Banfield praised in his description Howells’ earlier song “The Goat Paths” can only have been enhanced by the vast experience in sacred choral music he had amassed by the time “Song of the Secret” was composed. As is often the case with Howells, a chant-like, melismatic treatment of the vocal line which often runs along modal scaffolding establishes an ecclesiastical climate despite the secular text.

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<sup>98</sup> Banfield 220.

In an article that appeared in honor of Howells' seventy-fifth birthday, Hugh Ottaway compared him favorably to some composers of the Georgian period whose superficial treatment of texts confined them to the complacent sentimentality associated with the Victorian drawing room.

...in the main his sense of anguish and of aspiration have raised him well above [sentimentality and escapism]. And implicit in his vision of the beautiful is a keen awareness of its transience and vulnerability. There is nothing complacent in that.<sup>99</sup>

As this poem deals directly with the transience of beauty, the pathos of Howells' writing validates Ottaway's observation. Howells' unique expression of pathos is apparent from the opening two measures. (See Figure 40.) The intervals of a second on beat two establish a plaintive yearning, a quality Howells clearly sought to amplify through his dynamic indications.

Figure 40. "The Song of the Secret," mm. 1-4.



<sup>99</sup> Hugh Ottaway 899.

In the opening line, “Where is beauty? Gone, gone:,” the first “Gone” receives the same technique Howells used to create one of the most effective moments in “King David”—a single held note held in the vocal part that changes function dramatically due to a shift in the harmony beneath it. In the present example (Figure 41), the singer’s A-sharp first belongs as the 5th in an E-flat minor chord. It then becomes the 7<sup>th</sup> of a B minor-major 7<sup>th</sup> chord, creating an unsettling shift into a soured and desolate mood. Two subtle details heighten the effectiveness of this maneuver and point to Howells’ great skill as a miniaturist: 1) the second chord is especially jarring by virtue of being preceded by completely diatonic harmony; and 2) the singer’s A-sharp over the first chord has reinforcement in the piano (as an enharmonic B-flat) but as the chord shifts, the voice part supplies the only a-sharp. It is, like the poet’s subject, alienated. The sullen, chromatically falling two-note repetition of “gone” that follows maintains this isolation, accentuated by the natural decay of the piano. Neither the A-natural or G-sharp is present in the accompaniment.

Figure 41. “The Song of the Secret,” mm. 6-9.

The musical score for "The Song of the Secret," mm. 6-9, is written in 4/4 time with a key signature of three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The vocal line (soprano) begins with a whole note "Gone," followed by a half note "gone:". The piano accompaniment (piano) consists of a right hand and a left hand. The right hand has a melodic line with a chromatic descent from G4 to F#4. The left hand has a bass line with a chromatic descent from B3 to A2. Dynamics include *mp*, *p*, and *pp*. Tempo markings include *poco rit.* and a fermata over the final note.

Howells continues to fix his attention on the key word “gone.” The next time it appears, he escalates the intensity from its first statement in measure 7. G7 chords with a cross relation (B against B-flat) in measures 21-22—the most bitter Howells deploys in this song—color the word this appearance and the repetition of the word falls on a tone often mined by Howells for its expressive potential, the raised 4<sup>th</sup>. These piquant harmonies launch the most outwardly anguished passage of the song. (See Figure 42.)

Figure 42. “Song of the Secret,” mm. 21-25.

The musical score for "Song of the Secret," measures 21-25, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for measures 21-25. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Gone, gone Is" and continues with "beau - - - ty from - me." The piano accompaniment features a prominent G7 chord in measures 21-22, characterized by a cross relation (B against B-flat). The score includes dynamic markings such as *mf*, *mf molto espress.*, *cresc.*, *mf*, and *poco f*. The key signature is B-flat major, and the time signature is 4/4. The score is written for voice and piano, with the piano part featuring a complex harmonic structure.

The interlude following this outburst culminates in a return to the original seconds motive with a faltering beginning, touchingly vulnerable in its effect. (See Figure 43.)

Figure 43. “Song of the Secret,” mm. 25-29, piano only.

The image displays a musical score for piano, measures 25-29 of the piece "Song of the Secret." The score is written for a single piano instrument, with a grand staff consisting of a treble and a bass clef. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat), and the time signature is 4/4. The music features a complex, chromatic melody in the right hand, with many accidentals and a "cresc." (crescendo) marking. The left hand provides a harmonic accompaniment with chords and moving lines. A "Red" marking is present below the first measure of the left hand, and a "\*" symbol is located below the second measure. The score is divided into two systems: the first system covers measures 25-28, and the second system covers measures 29-32. The notation includes various musical symbols such as notes, rests, accidentals, and dynamic markings.

This motive maintains a presence at the beginning of the second stanza, covertly informing the scoring of the accompaniment. (See Figure 44.) The original diatonic frame of reference for the motive is replaced by a tritonal relationship between E-flat and A harmonies. This mixing of distantly related chords creates a dark murkiness appropriate to the water imagery of the text.

Figure 44. “The Song of the Secret,” mm. 32-33, piano only.

The musical score for Figure 44 shows the piano accompaniment for measures 32 and 33 of "The Song of the Secret." The score is written for piano (p) and features a treble and bass staff. The key signature is three flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat). The melody in the treble staff is:  $\text{The green - leafed wil - low, — Droop -}$ . The piano accompaniment in the bass staff consists of a series of chords and single notes, including a prominent F-sharp in measure 33. The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings.

The song's ending is approached with another fine example of the singer's holding a note which begins in consonance and then gathers intensity through harmonic motion to more dissonant chords occurs on the F-sharp on "sighing." (See Figure 45.)



Figure 45. “Song of the Secret,” mm. 38-45.

The musical score for "Song of the Secret," measures 38-45, is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 38-41) is in 4/4 time and G major. The vocal line begins with a whole note "Sigh -" followed by a half note "ing a beau - ty" and a half note "Se - cret as a". The piano accompaniment features a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second system (measures 42-45) is in 3/4 time and G major. The vocal line continues with "dream." and a final whole note. The piano accompaniment includes a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings: *p*, *pp*, *ppp*, and *estinto*. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature changes from 4/4 to 3/4 at measure 43.

From measure 8 until this point in the song Howells avoided the minor-major 7<sup>th</sup> chord. Its use at the end, along with two more instances of that chord in quick succession, acts as rumination on that initial wound. In fact, the G-sharp minor-major 7<sup>th</sup> in bar 43, while the penultimate in the song, is the last chord upon which the listener’s ear really

settles. The final chord, played *ppp* and consisting of a softer dissonance, suggests a blurring out technique in cinematography or ink painting.

*Songs of the Supernatural*

Houses, as the years collect, become densely populated.<sup>100</sup>  
—Walter de la Mare

The songs listed above share significant similarities with regard to poetic content and musical atmosphere and can therefore be discussed, at least in their rudiments, as a group. Shadowy ghost encounters, seemingly with the dead, form the inspiration for all three. Consistent with de la Mare's view that places maintain the presence of former occupants, all three poems take place in or around houses. In "The Old Stone House," a child (presumably) must pass an abandoned house containing a real or imagined ghost; in "Some One," a knock on the door is clearly heard yet no one is seen; and in "The Old House," a house is described into which people "forlorn and still" go and never return.

One other song in *Garland*, "The Three Cherry Trees," also features a glimpse of the spirit world and the following discussion may inform one's understanding of it. However, as it does not aspire to the same disquieting mixture of dread and curiosity common to the current group, and because its musical treatment is sufficiently unique, it has received its own discussion.

"The Old Stone House," "Some One," and "The Old House" are but a minute sampling of de la Mare's extensive writing within the sub-genre of ghost poems and short

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<sup>100</sup> Walter de la Mare, "The House," *Ghost Stories* (London: Folio Society 1956) 53.

stories. Owing to his unique treatment of the supernatural, an awareness of this larger body of work inevitably brings an understanding and appreciation of these three poems one might not otherwise have. Above all, it is important to remember that, as stated earlier, the topic of ghosts was, for de la Mare, more than a sensationalist way to grab a reader's attention. As historian and writer Lord David Cecil put it, "His ghosts and hauntings are no mere device to awake pleasing shudders, but symbols of his belief in the soul's immortality, its capacity to influence events in this world even after death."<sup>101</sup> De la Mare approached the theme in his writings with utter sincerity.

Another crucial aspect of de la Mare's ghosts is that they are rarely malicious. Most often, in his short stories, they behave more nobly and benevolently than the living. An example is "Bad Company," in which a remorseful ghost guides a stranger into his house in order to destroy the heartless Last Will drafted just before his passing. Another is "An Anniversary," wherein the ghost of a woman's true love haunts the house where she now lives in a loveless marriage with an antagonistic husband. The above examples illustrate a common theme—spirits of the departed attempting to redeem their own misdeeds or to thwart the evil and injustice of those still living. It seems that, once freed from earthbound concerns, de la Mare's ghosts operate from a higher moral plain, compelled to attempt contact with the living in order to set things right.

Naturally, due to the brevity of poetry, we are offered little or no insight into the possible motives of the spirits depicted therein. That is certainly the case with the present poems. Familiarity with de la Mare's ghosts in prose, however, allows one to imagine a

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<sup>101</sup> De la Mare, "Ghost Stories" from the Introduction.

deeper dimension to their enigmatic poetic counterparts and inclines one to temper one's instinctive dread with some empathy for their darkly tragic situation. The "friendless face" encountered in "The Old Stone House," for instance, is not necessarily "friendless" in the sense of being unlovable or evil, but more likely in the sense of being locked in a painful solitude, owing to some obsession which will not give him or her release. An admixture of fear, curiosity, compassion, and sometimes even a sad beauty surround the ghosts in these poems and stories, a subtle blend of emotions which Howells seemed to apprehend. Accordingly, Hold found that of all the songs in *Garland*, "some of the most sensuously beautiful music"<sup>102</sup> came from "The Old House."

If these three poems radiate from a similar emotional sphere, so too do Howells' settings of them. The comparisons between the two men put forth by Palmer apply very neatly in the case of these songs. For instance, Palmer borrows words of de la Mare, which had been used to describe a child-like imagination (such as the poet valued and possessed), in order to show how uncannily they apply to Howells' aesthetic as well. The passage includes the phrases "hinted at, rather than expressed," "bathed in an unearthly atmosphere," and "inward and spiritual significance." The tonal ambiguity, sparse textures, exotic non-diatonic scale structures, and silences employed by Howells hone directly in on the poems' "unearthly atmosphere." In these songs, Howells' writing is particularly evasive and vague. By valuing the "hinted at, rather than expressed" we can see how seamlessly Howells' musical approach elides with the key principle of writing in

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<sup>102</sup> Hold 304.

the ghost genre according to Kenneth Hopkins, a principle he felt de la Mare grasped better than any of his contemporaries:

For this, we must have an ever-present consciousness that something is left unsaid, or that what is said is not the whole; that there are shadows into which the writer cannot or dare not take us; [...] voices whose veiled utterance we prefer not to hear more clearly.<sup>103</sup>

De la Mare once provided his own view on what constitutes a good ghost story:

The reader's imagination...must be furtively quickened by a series of almost imperceptible hints, decoys, innuendos, into a peculiar sensitiveness.... Our journey over the borderland and into that stagnant, electric, sinister atmosphere must be as quiet and gradual as the coming on of night.<sup>104</sup>

As we shall see in these songs, “hints” and “innuendos” are often provided by Howells. Within the small scope of song the efficient language of music replaces the exposition of the short story, quickly establishing and maintaining the necessary atmosphere and placing the listener's mind in a state parallel to de la Mare's mysterious imaginings.

#### “The Old Stone House”

Nothing on the grey roof, nothing on the brown,  
Only a little greening where the rain drips down;  
Nobody at the window, nobody at the door,  
Only a little hollow which a foot once wore;

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<sup>103</sup> Quoted in de la Mare, “Ghost Stories” in the introduction.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in de la Mare, “Ghost Stories” in the introduction. The quote is from de la Mare's forward to “Eleven Ghost Stories.”

But still I tread on tiptoe, still tiptoe on I go,  
Past nettles, porch, and weedy well, for oh, I know  
A friendless face is peering, and a still clear eye  
Peeps closely through the casement  
as my step goes by.

“The Old Stone House” distinguishes itself by being the only song in “Garland” that takes place in real time. In this miniature *scena*, we attend to a person’s inner dialogue while passing a haunted house. Though not explicitly stated, several reasons exist for envisioning the subject as a child, the most compelling of which is that the poem was targeted at children, undoubtedly the age at which the poem’s situation would be the most terror-inducing. Additionally, we more readily envision a child walking “on tiptoe” than an adult. In attitude, the poem is comparable to Scout’s trepidation when having to pass by Boo Radley’s house in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, though the houses’ residents are of a different nature.

The simplicity, directness, and repetitiveness of Howells’ opening vocal line clearly suggest Howells sought to depict the uncomplicated vulnerability of a child. In melodic shape and rhythm, it resembles a nursery rhyme, though of a dark character owing to the minor mode. The vocal line, unambiguously in D minor tonality, shares an uneasy coexistence with the vague accompaniment of a quasi B-minor cast, which rather than offer support acts as haunting adversary. (See Figure 46.)

Figure 46. “The Old Stone House,” mm. 1-11.

Lento, tranquillo (quasi negativo)

Voice

Piano

*pp*

*p*

No-thing on the grey roof, no-thing on the brown.

On - ly a lit-tle green-ing where the rain drips down.

This sinister juxtaposition of innocence with the threat of evil resembles the common horror-movie device of applying audio-altering effects to a child singing, music box, or other musical meme strongly associated with childhood.

Only at the end of the second phrase does the melody deviate from strict D minor. A raised 4th creates a foreboding augmented second as the child’s eye lingers on the

hollow which is worn into the step—a metaphorical ghost of the house’s past occupancy. As in de la Mare’s novels, these images give clues which suggest the situation without direct statement. Other observations by the child round out the scene. “A little greening where the rains drips down” (perhaps from some rusting copper feature, or perhaps moss or algae growing beneath a broken gutter) and “weedy well,” (i.e. neglect) tacitly convey that the house is both old and abandoned.

The stillness of the beginning, marked *Lento, tranquillo (quasi negativo)*<sup>105</sup> implies that the child has been motionless, not yet brave enough to proceed. His or her soft tread is heard in the piano once enough courage is gathered to tiptoe by the house. A pedal tone in the left hand maintains tension as the right hand chords escalate in dissonance. (See Figure 47.)

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<sup>105</sup> *Negativo*=inactive.



Figure 47. “The Old Stone House,” mm. 21-25.

*un poco più con anima*  
*p*  
 But still I tread on  
*un poco più con anima*  
*pp*

tip - toe, still tip - toe on I go, — Past net - tles,

*mp*

*poco cresc.*  
 porch and weed - y well, — for

Those who have had to progress through a scary place will recall the experience of having their attempts at bravery suddenly overtaken by a shudder of fear. In “The Old Stone House” such a shudder occurs on the line “for, oh, I know a friendless face is peering.” Howells depicts this emotion by setting these words to the highest melodic crest, at the same time conveying the strangeness of the (real or imagined) otherworldly

figure through the pervasive use of whole tones. Additionally, the chords preceding this line (see again Figure 47) culminate in the most strongly dissonant in the series at this point. Two interlocking seconds (one displaced as a major 7<sup>th</sup>) as well as a tritone make for a frightful chord at this crucial point in the text. (See Figure 48.)

Figure 48. "The Old Stone House," mm. 25-30.

The musical score for "The Old Stone House" (mm. 25-30) is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the first two measures. The vocal line has the lyrics "for oh, I know A friend - less". The piano accompaniment features a dynamic marking of *mp* and a crescendo hairpin. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the next three measures. The vocal line has the lyrics "face is peer-ing, and a clear still eye Peeps close-ly through the". The piano accompaniment features dynamic markings of *mp*, *p*, *pp*, and *p estinto*, along with crescendo and decrescendo hairpins. The third system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the final measure. The vocal line has the lyrics "case - ment". The piano accompaniment features a decrescendo hairpin.

The song closes with sparse octaves in the piano similar to those at the beginning which now seem the perfect accompaniment to that strange, blank stare. However, a change has occurred in both voice and piano. The contact, however brief, between child and spirit seems to have affected them both. The final measures of the voice line resemble the piano part (the spirit) at the song's opening both intervallically and by ending on a B. The piano part settles on a D, the former tonic of the voice part. (See Figure 49.)

Figure 49. "The Old Stone House," mm. 31-36.

The musical score for "The Old Stone House," measures 31-36, is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and the piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a half rest, followed by a quarter note G4, a quarter note A4, a quarter note B4, and a half note C5. The piano accompaniment consists of sparse octaves in the right hand and single notes in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings such as "rit. e dim" and "meno mosso". The second system shows the continuation of the piano accompaniment, featuring a series of octaves in the right hand and single notes in the left hand, ending with a final chord.

“Some One”

Some one came knocking  
At my wee, small door;  
Someone came knocking;  
I'm sure-sure-sure;  
I listened, I opened,  
I looked to left and right,  
But nought there was a stirring  
In the still dark night;  
Only the busy beetle  
Tap-tapping in the wall,  
Only from the forest  
The screech-owl's call,  
Only the cricket whistling  
While the dewdrops fall,  
So I know not who came knocking,  
At all, at all, at all.

Three vexing knocks on the door initiate Howells' setting of “Some One,” supplying the impetus for the poem's first line “Some one came knocking at my wee, small door.” (See Figure 50.)

Figure 50. “Some One,” mm. 1-3.



The image of a knock at the door may remind de la Mare readers of his celebrated poem “The Listeners.” While “Some One” does not aspire to the Poe-like grandeur of “The Listeners” and utilizes a more child-oriented, almost fairytale language, e.g. “wee,

small door,” they are counterparts nonetheless. The theme of partial communication between the living and the dead links the two poems. Whereas in “The Listeners,” a traveler’s knock (“from the world of man”) is heard but not replied to by the “phantom listeners that dwelt in the house,” “Some One” reverses the roles. This time, the living occupant tries to respond to the phantom who knocks on their door, vainly concluding, “So, I know not who came knocking, at all, at all, at all.”

By scoring three knocks in the piano introduction, Howells may have wished to amplify the triple repetition of text that occurs early in the poem—“sure, sure, sure”—and in the above-quoted closing line. Perhaps simply coincidentally, the song itself divides into three distinct sections. These divisions serve to highlight the structure of the poem which, in its original published form, appears without any breaks that delineate separate stanzas.

The expository section consists of the beginning of the poem though the lines “But nought there was astirring / In the still dark night.” The opening knocks reverberate throughout this first section in a sparse, inexplicit accompaniment termed “deliberately sketchy” by Hold. One of the chief components of these haunting chords, the thirds preceded by grace notes a half-step away, finds melodic expression in the voice part. Much of the vocal material is generated by variants of a third bordered by neighboring semi-tones. (See Figure 51.) As with the chords, this non-diatonic collection of pitches promotes an eerie environment.

Figure 51. “Some One,” mm. 4-11.

The musical score for "Some One," measures 4-11, is presented in two systems. The first system contains measures 4-6, and the second system contains measures 7-11. The vocal line is written in a single staff, and the piano accompaniment is written in two staves. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is 4/4. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "Some one... came knock-ing At my wee, small door;". The piano accompaniment features a slurred staccato motive in the right hand. The second system contains the lyrics "Some one came knock-ing, I'm sure— sure— sure; I list-ened, I o-pened,—". The piano accompaniment includes a section marked "colla voce" in the right hand. Dynamics include *pp* (pianissimo), *p* (piano), and *mf* (mezzo-forte).

In the second section of the song, the poem’s subject scans his or her surroundings with quickened senses for signs of the visitor only to notice sounds from a beetle, owl, and cricket. This new passage maintains links with the first section via vestiges of the third-plus-a-semi-tone motif in the melody line—most notably in the text painting of the screech owl’s call (measure 22)—and in echoes of the knocking figure, particularly in measure 24-26. However, a change in the piano scoring along with a freer approach to the vocal writing clearly delineates this portion from the first. The slurred staccato motive that made a tentative initial appearance several measures earlier here becomes the key textural element of the accompaniment.

The beginning of each of these lines (all starting with “Only...”) escalates in pitch and suspense. But while the third of the series begins higher than the others, its ending lowers in pitch and dynamic as text painting of the phrase “While the dewdrops fall.” This lowers the tension momentarily until the piano’s incisive outburst in measure 28, perhaps another false alarm, breaks the stillness. (See Figure 52.)

Figure 52. "Some One," mm. 18-29.

On - ly the bu - sy bee-tle Tap - tap-ping in the wall, \_\_\_\_\_

*mf* *Red.* *poco allarg.* *a tempo*

On - ly from the fo-rest The screech - owl's call, \_\_\_\_\_

*colla voce* *a tempo* *mf* *Red.* \*

*mf* On - - ly the crick-et whist-ling While the

*p* *poco marc.* *pp*

*pp* dew - drops fall,

*mf* *p*



After a softer, inconclusive follow-up to this intrusion, the brief final section—a sort of coda—begins. A few oddly juxtaposed chords, none in root position, depict the perplexed state of the subject. The last chord, an inversion of an E-flat dominant with an added 9<sup>th</sup> and raised 4<sup>th</sup> (11<sup>th</sup>), is a characteristic choice by Howells, especially for cadential passages. It underpins the only portion of the voice line constructed on a whole-tone scale. Though the melody comes to rest on the initial tonic of the song, this whole-tone inflection creates a final impression of stunned uncertainty. (See Figure 53.)

Figure 53. “Some One,” mm. 31-37.

The musical score for "Some One" (mm. 31-37) is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 31-34) features a vocal line in treble clef and a piano accompaniment in grand staff. The tempo is marked *meno mosso*. The vocal line begins with a whole note G4, followed by a half note F#4, and then a quarter note E4. The piano accompaniment consists of a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The second system (mm. 35-37) continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked *rall., estinto*. The vocal line begins with a whole note G4, followed by a half note F#4, and then a quarter note E4. The piano accompaniment consists of a series of chords in the right hand and a single note in the left hand. The score includes dynamic markings such as *pp*, *ppp*, and *ppp*.

“The Old House”

A very, very old house I know-  
And ever so many people go,  
Past the small lodge, forlorn and still,  
Under the heavy branches, till  
Comes the blank wall, and there's the door.  
Go in they do; come out no more.  
No voice says aught; no spark of light  
Across that threshold cheers the sight;  
Only the evening star on high  
Less lonely makes a lonely sky,  
As, one by one, the people go  
Into that very old house I know.

In its overtly metaphorical nature, “The Old House” offers contrast to the other ghost poems in *Garland*. The poem’s subject, less immediately involved in the action than the others, tells of an old house into which “ever so many people go.” De la Mare makes no overt mention of them being “spirits” as opposed to living people but it is suggested by their “forlorn and still” countenance, the fact that “No voice says aught,” and, most tellingly, from the phrase “Go in they do; come out no more.” Clearly, the poem ventures a look over the mysterious borderline of death.

The images quoted above convey a gloomy picture, as does Howells’ harmonically indeterminate prelude. Low-registered fifths sound as a death knell while the chromatic twisting of the right hand portends something ominous. (See Figure 54.)

Figure 54. “The Old House,” mm. 1-5 piano only.



In keeping with the somnambulant atmosphere of the poem, “The Old House” differs greatly in phrase length from the hesitant utterances in both “The Old Stone House” and “Some One.” Long, unhurried melodic strands in both the piano and voice depict the spirits’ procession into the house. The singer often sings as if in a daze like that of the disembodied souls. One conspicuous example occurs in measure 18—a significant point in the poem at which the house’s door is reached. (See Figure 55.) Howells conveys the gravitas of this moment, when no final appeal can be made to delay entry into the house, with a reappearance of the opening theme—now at a louder dynamic and, unlike the beginning, grounded unequivocally in its key (A minor) before it begins.

Figure 55. “The Old House,” mm.16-20.

The musical score for measures 16-20 of 'The Old House' is shown. The vocal line has lyrics: "till Comes the blank wall, and there's the door." The tempo markings are *rit.*, *a tempo*, and *rall.*. The dynamics are *p*, *mf*, and *pp*. The piano accompaniment features a long, flowing phrase in the right hand and a more rhythmic line in the left hand. The marking *colla voce* is present.

As is common in de la Mare's writing (and as was also seen in "The Old Stone House," "Some One," and "Before Dawn"), the lens pulls back to describe the surroundings. In the line "Only the evening star on high less lonely makes a lonely sky." Howells seizes on this line as an opportunity to initiate a novel mood of beauty and solace.

This abrupt shift in character is accomplished largely by a new, decidedly less austere texture in the piano. Widely spread sonorities permeate the soundscape with a series of major tonalities (A, then C, then E-flat, all with added color tones) whose ascending root motion gives a welcome feeling of hope. The freshness of this passage obscures that fact that it actually originates from the opening material. "The Old House" exhibits the economy of means with regard to motivic unity observable in several other *Garland* songs, in particular "The Lady Caroline" and "King David." Not only does the right hand produce variants on the motive from the song's first measures, the left hand forms a mesmerizing repetition of the motive's contour at the eighth note level. (See Figure 56.)

Figure 56. “The Old House,” mm. 28-33.

The musical score for "The Old House" (mm. 28-33) is presented in two systems. The first system shows the vocal line and the piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "On - ly the eve - ning star" and continues with "on high Less lone - ly makes a lone - ly". The piano accompaniment features a prominent "Original motive" in the right hand, which is a descending eighth-note scale. The tempo is marked "a tempo" and the dynamics range from "mp" to "pp". The score includes various musical notations such as slurs, ties, and dynamic markings like "poco" and "poco smorzando".

Though “The Old House” begins with an unnerving prelude, as the song progresses the initial tempo marking *Poco lento; con tranquillità estremo* (with extreme tranquility) seems more and more justified. The postlude attests to Howells’ spiritual depth (forged, one would expect, by enduring the death of his son) as well as his experience as a composer of church music. Rather than continue to emphasize the eeriness of the poem, Howells offers a sort of requiem for the souls that have entered the house. The utterly unprepared F-sharp major chord in the third to last measure speaks of transcendent release especially with the added luminosity of the raised fourth. In the end we are left with a profoundly restful stillness. (See Figure 57.)

Figure 57. “The Old House,” mm. 37-46.



### *Folk Rhyme Songs*

As stated earlier, de la Mare and Howells preferred to take a unique approach to existing forms and traditions rather than to blaze wholly new paths. An example of this proclivity is their incorporation of native folk idioms into their work. This practice reflected their deep love of England and its cultural heritage, as well as the historical coincidence of their formative years with the English nationalist movement.

De la Mare read and admired the Victorian authors whose poems and stories adapted folk-tale and fairy-tale components (e.g. William Thachery (1811-1863), Charles Kingsley (1819-1975), and Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875)). As a children’s author, this genre understandably appealed to him. In the three remaining poems, “The

Old Soldier,” “A Queer Story,” and “Andy Battle,” de la Mare applied this familiarity with children’s literature. Though completely original products of the twentieth century, they have features that firmly place them stylistically within established English folk traditions. Archaisms of syntax, spelling, grammar, and pronunciation lend an “age-old” quality to the tales therein, for example, “Once and there was a young sailor, yeo ho! / And he sailed out over the say,” from “Andy Battle;” or, from “A Queer Story,” “Three Jolly Farmers / Once bet a pound / Each dance the others would / Off the ground. / Out of their coats / They slipped right soon, / And neat and nicesome, / Put each his shoon.<sup>106</sup>” Additionally, the use of non-lexical vocables—“fol rol dol rol di do” in “The Old Soldier” and “yeo ho” in “Andy Battle”—clearly evokes the folk-song and shanty traditions. The inclusion of these standard nonsense syllables almost necessitates that the poems be set to music to be fully realized.

In the tradition of nonsense limericist Edward Lear (1812-1888),<sup>107</sup> de la Mare intended these poems primarily to delight the young or the young at heart. The primary themes he explores in most of his writing, particularly regarding the limits of our senses, are set aside in favor of playful absorption into the fantastical. Unlike the other poems of *Garland*, these are unmistakably intended for a young audience.

The fanciful mood of these poems matches that of the poems selected by Howells for *Peacock Pie*, *Set I*, the only other de la Mare songs he published before *Garland*, with

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<sup>106</sup> Shoon=shoes.

<sup>107</sup> Edward Lear is most famous for his nonsense poem “The Owl and the Pussycat.”

the exception of “King David.”<sup>108</sup> “The Old Soldier” and “Andy Battle” were sketched in 1919 and envisioned as part of *Peacock Pie, Set II*. Clearly, in his younger years, Howells had been drawn to this playful side of de la Mare. At least in part, this interest may have been incited by the work of Walford Davies, one of Howells’ former professors at the Royal College of Music, who set dozens of nursery rhymes and was somewhat of a specialist in children’s music. Regardless of specific influence, it appears Howells’ childish spirit needed little encouragement. The following journal entry concerning the creation of his 1921 set of piano pieces, *Snapshots*, provides a telling glimpse at Howells’ playful imagination and highlights the similarity between his creative mind and de la Mare’s:

Tonight, ‘Wee Willie Winkle’<sup>109</sup> began a mad running about upstairs and downstairs in my head. He will run into the Piano ‘Snapshots’ he says. But he is so mad and lovable. And he’s sooner in one key than in another—often, in fact, in two keys at once. He argues; ‘One leg, one key, two legs, two keys’. He’ll claim a key for each finger soon, I fear!<sup>110</sup>

The harmonic freedom of “The Old Soldier” and “Andy Battle” is bounded by their quasi-strophic form, but the manic playfulness described in this journal entry and the sense of “madness” created by quick changes of key is given free rein in “A Queer Story.”

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<sup>108</sup> Howells had set other de la Mare poems for vocal ensembles, however.

<sup>109</sup> A character from a Scottish nursery rhyme written by William Miller. Similar to the sandman legend, Willie Winkle runs through town at night peering in on the children and admonishing them to sleep.

<sup>110</sup> Palmer *Centenary Celebration* 76. The quote comes from a diary entry from Monday, February 1919.



The present songs provide the only moments of levity in the predominantly meditative *Garland*. Generally speaking, the ecclesiastical atmosphere that colors the other songs in *Garland* is absent from these folk-based settings. Instead, lively and cheerful folk melodies pervade.

With their brisk rhythms and flatted seventh modality, “The Old Soldier” and “Andy Battle” feature the most unrefined vocal lines found in the set and, as would be expected in folk music, they have a high degree of strophism. But while the voice parts are unusually tuneful for Howells, the piano part is characteristically evasive in harmony. Just as Benjamin Britten did in his folk song arrangements, Howells often avoids the root that seems most implicit in the vocal line. Often the accompaniment simply serves to accentuate the declamation of the text rather than to supply a fully-formed texture on which to fit the vocal line. (See Figure 58.)

Figure 58. "The Old Soldier," mm. 7-13.

The wars had

thinned him ve-ry bare, Fight-ing and march-ing eve-ry-where, —

Red. \* Red. \* Red.

ff

In all three songs, the dissonance of the chords, their complexity, and their jarring juxtaposition often cause them to fulfill a rhythmic rather than harmonic function. The following example shows some typical chords Howells uses in this manner. The first, an augmented chord with an added semitone dissonance, is a favorite of Howells'. The second is polytonal (A-sharp minor over B minor). And the last also utilizes a semi-tone

clash in addition to being placed in the low register, augmenting its percussive quality.

(See Figure 59.)

Figure 59. “A Queer Story,” mm. 15-17.

The musical score for "A Queer Story" (mm. 15-17) is presented in three systems. The top system features a vocal line in treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a time signature of 8/8. The lyrics "One— Two— Three!—" are written below the notes. The middle system shows the piano accompaniment in treble clef, with dynamic markings *ff*, *mf*, and *f*. The bottom system shows the piano accompaniment in bass clef. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Considering the totality of *Garland*, the piano writing for these folk-inspired songs is conspicuously energetic. The inward, spiritually significant atmosphere most indicative of Howells’ and de la Mare’s “collective genius,” is replaced with rugged muscularity, as shown in the examples below containing thick chords or octaves marked with sforzandos or other percussive markings. (See Figure 60.)

Figure 60. Folk Rhyme Piano Excerpts.

“The Old Soldier”, mm. 76-80.

musical score for "The Old Soldier" (mm. 76-80). The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. It features a piano introduction with a forte (ff) dynamic. The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The piece ends with a fortissimo (fff) dynamic.

“A Queer Story”, mm. 163-167.

musical score for "A Queer Story" (mm. 163-167). The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. It features a piano introduction with a forte (ff) dynamic. The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The piece ends with a fortissimo (fff) dynamic.

“Andy Battle”, mm. 1-4.

Come storiella; vivace (♩ = 72)

musical score for "Andy Battle" (mm. 1-4). The score is in 3/4 time, key of D major. It features a piano introduction with a forte (f) dynamic. The melody is in the right hand, and the bass line is in the left hand. The piece ends with a fortissimo (sf) dynamic.

While the piano writing is of a different character than the remainder of *Garland*, it remains in keeping with Howells' general approach in offering commentary of an improvisatory quality, depicting elements of the text in sound, allowing for rumination, or punctuating major breaks in the poetry. In these three songs Howells' gift for narrative (praised by Banfield<sup>111</sup> and referred to above in connection with "King David") comes very much to the fore.

"The Old Soldier"

There came an Old Soldier to my door,  
Asked a crust, and asked no more;  
The wars had thinned him very bare,  
Fighting and marching everywhere,  
With a Fol rol dol rol di do.

With nose stuck out, and cheek sunk in,  
A bristling beard upon his chin -  
Powder and bullets and wounds and drums  
Had come to that Soldier as suchlike comes -  
With a Fol rol dol rol di do.

'Twas sweet and fresh with buds of May,  
Flowers springing from every spray;  
And when he had supped the Old Soldier trolled  
The song of youth that never grows old,  
Called Fol rol dol rol di do.

Most of him rags, and all of him lean,  
And the belt round his belly drawn tightsome in  
He lifted his peaked old grizzled head,  
And these were the very same words he said-  
A Fol-rol-dol-rol-di-do.

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<sup>111</sup> Banfield 226.

As characters, the old soldier, the three farmers in “A Queer Story,” and Andy Battle are but a few of the amusing personages that fill the pages of de la Mare’s *Peacock Pie* collection. Though the title “The Old Soldier” might create the expectation of a poem laden with pathos, the poem is actually a lighthearted and humorous portrayal of an old soldier who appears on a stranger’s doorstep asking for a bite to eat. De la Mare does not connect the soldier to any real-world situation or historically-specific war and instead emphasizes details a child might fixate on. He provides an amusing description of the man’s physical appearance—“with nose stuck out, and cheek sunk in, a bristling beard upon his chin,”—“most of him rags, and all of him lean”—and highlights his comically boisterous character. Somehow, despite the soldier’s hard life and old age, he still sings “the song of youth that never grows old / fol dol do ri do.”

Howells’ creates a surprisingly vivid portrait of the soldier as well, using musical means. From the start, the brusquely accented opening statement conveys the soldier’s rugged character. (See Figure 61.) The IV<sup>7</sup> in measure two is the first of several bluesy touches which contribute to the song’s earthy feel. In the last stanza the very same harmony is applied, this time in the key of A. (See Figure 62.) The juxtaposition between the major and minor thirds inherent in this chord progression (and endemic to the blues) is also found in the vocal line in measures 9 and 10. (See page 44, Figure 9.)

Figure 61. “The Old Soldier,” mm. 1-3.



Figure 62. “The Old Soldier,” mm. 70-71.

Several other musical features serve to further illustrate the soldier’s bearing.

After the first chorus, as the bold gesture in the piano seems to land on a “wrong” note (the E-sharp in measure 17), one can almost see the old man’s not-quite-convincing swagger. (See Figure 63.) Additionally, each following chorus of “fol dol ri do” is longer, louder, and higher than the first, as if the guest is getting progressively more at ease. (See Figure 64.) (Perhaps the guest has been offered some beer or wine.) To accommodate this feature Howells has altered the text on the third and final choruses.

Figure 63. “The Old Soldier,” mm. 15-18.



Figure 64. “The Old Soldier,” mm. 13-16 & 70-79.

First chorus

Last chorus

Elements of English folk song are widespread in “The Old Soldier.” In a broad sense, the song’s strophic construction evokes a folk song. Additionally, Howells creates vocal lines which are essentially Dorian despite occasional borrowings from other modes.



The openings of the first three strophes illustrate this best (strophes one and two being similar, a single example will suffice). (See Figure 65.)

Figure 65. “The Old Soldier,” mm. 3-7 & 37-39.

First strophe

Third strophe

As seen above, the first two stanzas (of four) are in F-sharp Dorian. They are varied from each other, but only slightly. The third stanza transitions to the satisfying if not surprising key of the relative key of A major. This bucolic portion of the song referring to spring (“’Twas sweet and fresh with buds of May”) takes on an almost Copland-like, American folk flavor. (See Figure 66.)

Figure 66. "The Old Soldier," mm. 35-43.

di do. *mf* 'Twas sweet and

fresh with <sup>\*</sup>buds of May, Flo - wers

spring - ing from eve - ry spray; And when he had

*p* *Ped.* <sup>\*</sup>

But while the fourth and final stanza ends in A major, Howells provides a more intricate and playful construction than merely repeating the third stanza. The interlude preceding it boldly proclaims A to be the tonic, but just before the voice enters a quizzical shift occurs in measure 57. Howells combines an F Dorian vocal line with a quirky, pointillistic piano accompaniment in a mixed mode that features flatted 5<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>

degrees. (See Figure 67.) This curious admixture re-establishes the oddness of the visitor. The return to A major for the last chorus of “Fol dol ri do” without us being aware where the modulation occurs is a testament to Howells’ formidable harmonic command.

Figure 67. “The Old Soldier,” mm. 55-61.

The musical score for "The Old Soldier" (mm. 55-61) is presented in two systems. The first system (mm. 55-57) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked *poco allarg.* and the dynamics are *ff*. The second system (mm. 58-61) features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo changes to *a tempo* at measure 58, and the dynamics are *sf* and *sf pp*. The vocal line includes the lyrics "Most of him rags, and all of him lean,".

Figure 67. “The Old Soldier,” mm. 55-61.

“A Queer Story”<sup>112</sup>

At six and a half minutes, “A Queer Story” is the largest, most detailed song in *Garland*. The score spans nearly one fourth of the 66 pages of music in the Thames edition (not counting the second version of “Before Dawn”). The poem itself lasts 28 stanzas, and tells the story of three farmers each of whom once bet a pound they could “dance the others [...] off the ground.” Once their contest begins, the farmers dance themselves through a long list of towns, passing a school, various meadows, churches, *et cetera*, until they finally arrive at the sea. At that point, two of the farmers are fatigued and ready to concede, but Farmer Turvey “ups his gaiters” and dances into the sea:

Down where the mermaids  
Pluck and play  
On their twangling harp  
In a sea-green day;  
Down where the mermaids,  
Finned and fair,  
Sleek with their combs  
Their yellow hair...

The two other farmers wait on the shore for Turvey to reappear. They call after him, falling into despondency when he does not reply. Finally, they declare Turvey the winner, throwing their coins into the sea. The unrealistic nature of the poem, akin to a silly story told to a child at bedtime, places it within the “nonsense” genre of children’s poetry, albeit tinged with sadness owing to the high cost of Turvey’s obsession—i.e., his life.

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<sup>112</sup> Due to the length of this poem it is provided in an appendix.

When reading the poem by itself, a compound meter emerges not unlike that found in the nursery rhymes “Humpty Dumpty” and “Jack Be Nimble.” Howells’ music conforms to the poem’s inherent triplet feel, alternating between quarter followed by eighth and duplet eighths when only two syllables fill one pulse. (For examples, one can peruse the various figures below.)

A poem of this length creates the musical challenge of sustaining a larger form than is typically found in art song. Howells approaches this issue by striking a balance between consistent and novel musical ideas, by creating sharp divisions in the song’s architecture, and by using a free-form melody which freely adapts to text inflection which allows the poem’s colorful narrative to carry the listener’s attention throughout the song.

The pervasive presence of the opening motive unifies the entire song. It appears several times at major section breaks in near-original form. Most often, however, it is woven more subtly into the texture of the accompaniment. With the flexibility and naturalness of a jazz improviser, Howells varies and deconstructs the motive, sometimes to the point of it being recognizable solely by its rhythm. Below, the opening motive is shown along with a small sampling of its many variations. (See Figure 68.)

Figure 68. “A Queer Story,” mm. 1-3, 24-26, 100-103, & 121-122.

Original motive:



Measures 24-26:



Measures 100-103:



Measures 121-122:



The consistency achieved by the prevalence of the main motive is counterbalanced by the frequent introduction of fresh musical ideas. As the farmers dance their way across England, new motives appear and vanish like changes in the scenery; for instance, the two-note slurs starting in measure 27 (see Figure 69), or the up-and-down motive suggestive of hills in measure 40-43. (See Figure 70.)

Figure 69. "A Queer Story," mm. 27-29.

Figure 69 shows measures 27-29 of the piece "A Queer Story." The music is in 3/8 time and D major. The vocal line is marked *deciso* and features the lyrics: "Past the school - room, — With knees well bent Fin - gers a -". The piano accompaniment consists of a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand. Dynamics include *f* (forte) and *p* (piano), with crescendos and decrescendos indicated by hairpins.

Figure 70. "A Queer Story," mm. 40-43.

Figure 70 shows measures 40-43 of the piece "A Queer Story." The music is in 3/8 time and D major. The vocal line is marked *mf* (mezzo-forte) and features the lyrics: "Then straight thro' Whippam, Down hill to Week, Footing it light-ly, But not too light-some". The piano accompaniment features a more active melody in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. Dynamics include *mf*, *f*, and *p*. The section concludes with the word "quick, —" in measure 43, where the piano part has a final flourish.

An underlying element of variety exists in the sharply contrasting formal divisions. These divisions, which begin once the story is well under way, provide the opportunity for markedly different writing, thus refreshing the listener's attention.

Indicative of the farmers' initial burst of energy, the first half of the song moves uninterrupted at a brisk pace, culminating with their arrival at sea. At this significant point, when the farmers have run out of land, the first silence occurs, followed by a slower section as two of the farmers catch their breath. (See Figure 71.)

Figure 71. "A Queer Story," mm. 79-88.

The musical score for "A Queer Story," mm. 79-88, is presented in three systems. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment in 6/8 time, key of D major. The tempo is marked *meno mosso*. The second system continues the vocal line with the lyrics "Says Farmer Bates, 'I puffs and I blows,—" and "What's un-der the". The piano part is marked *smorz.* and *quasi ad libertà*. The third system shows the vocal line with the lyrics "wa-ter,— Why, no man knows!" and the piano part marked *(a tempo)*. The piano part includes dynamic markings *mp*, *mf espr.*, and *pp*.



The remainder of the setting is divided into much shorter sections than the first: Turvey's entrance into the water (a brief revival of the opening followed by pedaled, watery affects in the piano), Bates' and Giles' despondency (*meno mosso con ruminazione*), and the final proclamation of Turvey's victory (a final return to the opening character).

Throughout all these formal changes, Howells' approach to the vocal writing remains consistently unlike the motivically unified piano part. It avoids tunefulness and recognizable repetition (except very occasionally at a localized motivic level). While a few key words are elongated for expressive purposes, the bulk of the melodic line follows the natural gestures of speech. This tonal evasiveness and lack of pattern compels the listener to fix their attention on the words, causing "A Queer Story" to come across as a musically-enhanced recitation as opposed to a bona fide song, as in the case of "The Old Soldier" and "Andy Battle." (See Figure 72.)

Figure 72. "A Queer Story," mm. 27-34.



This approach is suitable given the inherently narrative quality of the text. Several other texts in *Garland* feature this narrative mode in various guises—present-tense

vignette (“The Old Stone House), fable (“The Three Cherry Trees”), and reminiscence (“Some One”)—but nowhere else in such overt storytelling.

Howells setting of “A Queer Story” ends in an unexpected way. (See Figure 73.) One finds similarities to the conclusion of “Before Dawn,” (page 90, Figure 33) both in the jubilant (and typically Howellsian) Lydian coloration in measure 164 (the G-sharp above the D root) and the immediate retreat into nullifying dissonance in the measures that follow. It was not Howells’ personality to indulge in unchecked exuberance, or as we have seen in many of these songs, to supply facile, predictable endings. Rather, he tends to make a statement in his final measures. In this case, he seems intent on reiterating that this story is, in fact, “queer.” A solid, affirming ending, as found in “Old Soldier” (page 137, Figure 60), may have brought things too much into the realm of reality. Additionally, the brusque, almost violent, outburst in the last measure leads one to ruminate on the more disturbing undertones of the story.

Figure 73. “A Queer Story,” mm. 161-167.

The musical score for "A Queer Story" (mm. 161-167) is presented in three systems. Each system consists of a vocal staff and a piano staff. The key signature is D major (two sharps) and the time signature is 3/8. The vocal line includes the lyrics "You danced us square; Off the ground!" and "ff". The piano accompaniment includes markings "smorz. ma brillante", "ff", "assai marc.", and "sff". The score is divided into three systems, each with a vocal staff and a piano staff.

“Andy Battle”<sup>113</sup>

Once and there was a young sailor, yeo ho!  
 And he sailed out over the say  
 For the isles where pink coral and palm branches blow,  
 And the fire-flies turn night into day,  
 Yeo ho!  
 And the fire-flies turn night into day.

<sup>113</sup> Thames provides two possible first pages for “Andy Battle” marked A and B. The comments below refer to version A, which is the original version.

But the Dolphin went down in a tempest, yeo ho!  
And with three forsook sailors ashore,  
The portingales took him wh'ere sugar-canes grow,  
Their slave for to be evermore,  
Yeo ho!  
Their slave for to be evermore.

With his musket for mother and brother, yeo ho!  
He warred with the Cannibals drear,  
in forests where panthers pad soft to and fro,  
And the Pongo shakes noonday with fear,  
Yeo ho!  
And the Pongo shakes noonday with fear.

Now lean with long travail, all wasted with woe,  
With a monkey for messmate and friend,  
He sits 'neath the Cross in the cankering snow,  
And waites for his sorrowful end,  
Yeo ho!  
And waits for his sorrowful end.

Though the poem “Andy Battle” appears in de la Mare’s *Peacock Pie* collection, its original source is his 1910 novel “The Three Mulla-Mulgars” (sometimes called “The Three Royal Monkeys”), which he wrote for and read to his children. In the manner of Lewis Carroll before him and his younger contemporary J.R.R. Tolkien, de la Mare brings the reader into an imaginary world in which three royal monkeys born in exile (the “three forsook sailors” of the poem) are compelled by their father’s wish to make a courageous journey to their uncle’s Kingdom of Assasimmon.

In one of their adventures, the brightest monkey, Nod, saves Andy Battle, a shipwrecked sailor (and the only human featured in the story), beginning an unlikely friendship between man and beast. For a time, Nod and the homesick and lonesome Andy Battle are each other’s only companions. Andy teaches Nod rudimentary English and

they converse as much as is possible. (In this story, animals can talk but cannot fully understand other animals' languages). After a particularly chummy fire-side talk—about how monkeys and humans are usually mortal enemies—the sailor is moved to sing a song before they turn in for the night. He considers singing “Drunken Sailor” (modifying the words to “shipwrecked sailor”) or the folk song “Cherry Tree,” but in the end he states that he will “pipe [...] one of Andy’s own.”<sup>114</sup>

And soon [Andy’s] voice burst out so loud and fearless that the prowling panthers paused with cowering head and twitching ears, and the Jaccatrays<sup>115</sup> out of the shadows lifted their cringing eyes up to the moon, dolefully listening. And when the last two lines of each verse had been sung, Battle plucked more loudly at his strings, and Nod joined in.<sup>116</sup>

The words Andy sings are the very ones reprinted later in *Peacock Pie*. They recount several events of Nod and his story: the shipwreck and battles with cannibals<sup>117</sup> and *Portingales* (Portuguese). But perhaps most significant is Andy’s touching inclusion of Nod in the song (“With a monkey for messmate and friend”). Undoubtedly, the solidarity between Nod and Battle played a large part in critic Edward Wagenknecht’s

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<sup>114</sup> De la Mare, *The Three Mulla-mulgars* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1919). This title is also available online through Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/32620/32620-h/32620-h.htm>

<sup>115</sup> Jaccatrays are a fictional predatory beast.

<sup>116</sup> De la Mare *Three Mulla-mulgars* 128.

<sup>117</sup> Through “The Three Mulla-Mulgars” de la Mare aired his distaste for meat consumption, likening it to cannibalism in that we ourselves are part of the animal family. That Andy warred with cannibals placed him in better position to bridge the gap between man and beast.

describing “The Three Mulla-Mulgars” as “an epic of courage, a song of loyalty and love.”<sup>118</sup>

Howells’ brief introduction to “Andy Battle” encapsulates the adventure and daring of “The Three Mulla-Mulgars.” It introduces the two main motives informing the song: the metrically jarring quarter-note rhythm and the aggressive eighth-note gesture. (See Figure 74.)

Figure 74. “Andy Battle,” mm. 1-3.



The words “Yeo ho!” and the repetition of final phrases naturally conjured in Howells’ imagination a rugged sea shanty. The square phrases, simple intervals, and rhythmic vitality<sup>119</sup> which includes the occasional snap of eight-notes (i.e. measures 9 and 13) all give his newly composed melody stylistic authenticity. Additionally, as the example below shows, the 7<sup>th</sup> is consistently lowered as in the case of the most famous shanty, mentioned by Andy Battle himself, “Drunken Sailor.” Depending on whether the

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<sup>118</sup> Edward WagenKnecht, “News from Tishnar,” *College English* Vol. 3, No. 3, (Dec., 1941): 242.

<sup>119</sup> Shanties are, at heart, work songs necessitating a strong, repetitive rhythmic underpinning.

third is major or minor, the voice line is either in D Mixolydian or D Dorian. (See Figure 75.)

Figure 75. “Andy Battle,” mm. 4-23.

The musical score for "Andy Battle" (measures 4-23) is presented in four staves. The key signature is D major (two sharps). The time signature is 3/4. The first staff shows the voice line starting with a forte (*f*) dynamic, followed by a mezzo-forte (*mf*) section. A box labeled "Mixolydian" points to the first staff. The lyrics for the first staff are: "Once— and there was a young sai-lor, yeo". The second staff continues the voice line with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The lyrics are: "ho! And he sailed— out o - ver the say— For the isles where pink". The third staff shows the voice line with a box labeled "Dorian" pointing to it. The lyrics are: "co-ral and palm bran-ches blow, And the fire - flies turn night in-to day,— Yeo". The fourth staff shows the voice line with the lyrics: "ho! And the fire - flies turn night in-to day.—".

The melodic resemblance of each of the four verses suggests the strophism of an actual folk song, though “Andy Battle” cannot be said to be strictly strophic. Howells alters both in the voice line and the accompaniment, tailoring them to the changing subject matter. If one uses version A of the first page, these modifications grow progressively more pronounced. The second stanza differs only mildly from the first strophe. Howells alters its beginning in service of depicting the sinking ship, the semi-tones and non-diatonic pitches in the voice line emphasizing the drama of the event. (See Figure 76.) Octaves in the piano suggest war drums in measures 34-37. (See Figure 77.)

*mf*

But the *Dol-phin* went down in a tem-pest, yeo ho!

A musical score for the song 'The Rose Tree'. The score is written for two voices (Soprano and Alto) and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano part features a prominent melody in the right hand, often marked with a 'V' (Vibrato) or a 'P' (Piano). The vocal parts enter with the lyrics 'The Rose Tree' and 'The Rose Tree'.

150



Figure 78. "Andy Battle," mm. 47-55.

The musical score for "Andy Battle" (measures 47-55) is presented in three systems. The key signature is one sharp (F#) and the time signature is 3/4. The vocal line is written in a single staff, and the piano accompaniment is written in grand staff (treble and bass clefs).

**System 1 (Measures 47-48):** The vocal line begins with the lyrics "With his mus-ket for". The piano accompaniment consists of a few notes in the bass register.

**System 2 (Measures 49-54):** The vocal line continues with "mo-ther and brother,— yeo— ho! He warred with the Can-ni-bals". The piano accompaniment features a more active melody in the right hand, with a forte (*f*) dynamic marking in measure 50. A *Red.* (Reduction) marking is present below the piano part in measure 50, and an asterisk (\*) is placed below the piano part in measure 52.

**System 3 (Measures 55-56):** The vocal line concludes with "drear, In". The piano accompaniment continues with a melody in the right hand, marked with a piano (*p*) dynamic in measure 55.

In the final repetition of test in this verse the volume is dropped without any lessening of tension. (See Figure 79.) The reharmonization of D as the third of B minor in measure 68 speaks of danger. After a taut stillness, the audience itself receives a sneak attack in measure 75 as a tritone breaks the silence.

Figure 79. “Andy Battle,” mm. 65-77.

The musical score for "Andy Battle" (mm. 65-77) is written in D major (two sharps) and 3/4 time. It consists of a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a *subito* marking. The lyrics are "And the Pon - go shakes noon-day with fear." The piano accompaniment includes various dynamics such as *mp*, *p*, *pp*, *ppp*, *ff*, and *mf*, along with markings like *rall molto* and *rall*.

In the final stanza, Howells departs from the spirited version sung by Andy Battle in the novel in exchange for a rueful verse marked *meno mosso*; *espressivo*. Dorian mode, and a doleful canonic voice in the piano echoes the words “Now lean with long travail, all wasted with woe” reinforcing their languor. (See Figure 80.)

Figure 80. “Andy Battle,” mm. 79-81.

meno mosso; espressivo (♩ = 44)

*mp*

Now

*mp* *pp*

lean with long tra-vail, all was-ted with woe,

*mp doloroso*

In the final lines, Andy Battle sings of waiting for his death “in the cankering snow.” Though de la Mare’s novel takes place in the tropics, winters of brutal cold and snow threaten the main characters to the same degree as any other adversary. Says novelist and critic, Forrest Reid of this choice, “It is strange that this radiant, iridescent, winter beauty should haunt a tale of the tropics; but its dazzling whiteness of moon-fire and glittering frost gives the entire book a colour scheme definite as that of an actual picture.”<sup>120</sup>

<sup>120</sup> Forrest Reid, *Walter de la Mare: A Critical Study* (New York: Henry Holt, 1929) 117-118.

Though in this final verse Howells has broken from the boisterous joviality that frightened off the animals when Andy Battle sang the song in the story, the composer nonetheless discloses an insight into Andy Battle's situation that seems rooted in familiarity with the book. The utter desolation of this closing passage indicates that Howells was aware of the epic tragedy of Andy Battle's situation. Though the song was begun in fun, Andy Battle seems unable to shake off the realization that he likely has no hope of rescue. The key of B minor, which has consistently curtailed the shanty's joviality, settles in for good. The final decay of sound calls to mind a cinematic device in which the camera pulls back and the entire island where Nod and Andy are huddled by a fire is but a small dot surrounded by a vast uncharted ocean. (See Figure 81.)

Figure 81. "Andy Battle," mm. 88-94.

The musical score for "Andy Battle" (mm. 88-94) is presented in three systems. The first system includes a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line begins with the lyrics "And waits" and "for his sor-row-ful end." The piano accompaniment features a melodic line in the right hand and a bass line in the left hand. The second system continues the vocal and piano parts. The third system shows the vocal line ending with a fermata and the piano accompaniment concluding with a final chord. Performance markings include *rit.* (ritardando), *mp* (mezzo-piano), *più lento* (faster), *pp* (pianissimo), and *ppp* (pianississimo). The tempo changes from 6/8 to 9/8. A section marked "SEC." (second ending) is indicated in the piano part.

*rit. mp* *più lento*

And waits for his sor-row-ful end.

*rit. mp* *più lento*

*pp* *ppp*

SEC.

## CHAPTER IV

### CONCLUSION

In his survey of British song, Trevor Hold voices his opinion that Howells was “potentially<sup>121</sup> one of the finest English songwriters of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.”<sup>122</sup> Upon its belated release, *A Garland for de la Mare* provided eleven new titles from this masterful composer. It is unfortunate that, in the United States, they have since remained largely neglected. All eleven songs attest to the artistic heights that can be reached in art song when a profound like-mindedness exists between poet and composer. They are songs Howells either lived with and revised over multiple decades or composed in the full fruition of his creative talent. They show Howells at his best, not only as a composer, but as an affectionate, devoted friend who gave years of his life to create a warm tribute to de la Mare.<sup>123</sup>

In terms of musical quality, inspiration, and sensitivity to the text, the songs in *Garland* hold their own alongside the greatest British art songs. They fit squarely within the tradition forged by Vaughan Williams and Holst, with whom he shared similar ideals

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<sup>121</sup> The qualifier “potentially” refers to the fact that Howells all but abandoned the song genre early in his career.

<sup>122</sup> Hold 313.

<sup>123</sup> Howells composed several other works as affectionate gestures towards his friends, e.g. *The B's*, for his college friends Arthur Benjamin, Arthur Bliss, Ivor Gurney, and Francis Purcell; and his Clavichord suites *Lambert's Clavichord* and *Howells' Clavichord* (2 sets), each piece of which immortalizes a friend.

and background. At the same time, they form a unique contribution to British song owing to Howells' profound identification with the Tudor period and his strong Impressionistic bias. Indeed, the latter two facets of Howells' musical language align ideally with de la Mare's poetic language. Few composers were as well equipped to evoke the alternately archaic, dreamy, and eerie world of de la Mare's verse in sound.

During his lifetime, Howells arguably could have done more to promote these songs. He chose to fixate on their timely performance (at de la Mare's death and the centenary of his birth) and neglected to push for their publication. How fortunate it is that the work was saved from oblivion by several devoted friends and admirers. At this point, however, the precarious fate of these songs, which have yet to establish a strong foothold in the repertoire, rests in our hands. As singers, pianists, and teachers, we would do well to make these richly evocative and highly refined songs part of our current repertoire.

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## APPENDIX A

### “A QUEER STORY,” COMPLETE POEM<sup>124</sup>

Three jolly Farmers  
Once bet a pound  
Each dance the others would  
Off the ground.

Out of their coats  
They slipped right soon,  
And neat and nicesome  
Put each his shoon.

One -- Two -- Three!  
And away they go,  
Not too fast,  
And not too slow;

Out from the elm-tree's  
Noonday shadow,  
Into the sun  
And across the meadow.

Past the schoolroom,  
With knees well bent,  
Fingers a flicking,  
They dancing went.

Up sides and over,  
And round and round,  
They crossed click-clacking  
The Parish bound;

By Tupman's meadow  
They did their mile,  
Tee-to-tum  
On a three-barred stile.

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<sup>124</sup> In “Peacock Pie: a Book of Rhymes” the poem is titled “Off the Ground” under the larger heading of “Three Queer Tales.”

Then straight through Whipham,  
Downhill to Week,  
Footing it lightsome,  
But not too quick,

Up fields to Watchet  
And on through Wye,  
Till seven fine churches  
They'd seen slip by --

Seven fine churches,  
And five old mills,  
Farms in the valley,  
And sheep on the hills;

Old Man's Acre  
And Dead Man's Pool  
All left behind,  
As they danced through Wool.

And Wool gone by,  
Like tops that seem  
To spin in sleep  
They danced in dream:

Withy -- Wellover --  
Wassop -- Wo --  
Like an old clock  
Their heels did go.

A league and a league  
And a league they went,  
And not one weary,  
And not one spent.

And log, and behold!  
Past Willow-cum-Leigh  
Stretched with its waters  
The great green sea.

Says Farmer Bates,  
"I puffs and I blows,  
What's under the water,  
Why, no man knows!"

Says Farmer Giles,  
"My mind comes weak,  
And a good man drowned  
Is far to seek."

But Farmer Turvey,  
On twirling toes,  
Up's with his gaiters,  
And in he goes:

Down where the mermaids  
Pluck and play  
On their twangling harps  
In a sea-green day;

Down where the mermaids  
Finned and fair,  
Sleek with their combs  
Their yellow hair. . . .

Bates and Giles --  
On the shingle sat,  
Gazing at Turvey's  
Floating hat.

But never a ripple  
Nor bubble told  
Where he was supping  
Off plates of gold.

Never an echo  
Rilled through the sea  
Of the feasting and dancing  
And minstrelsy.

They called -- called -- called;  
Came no reply:  
Nought but the ripples'  
Sandy sigh.

Then glum and silent  
They sat instead,  
Vacantly brooding  
On home and bed,

Till both together stood up and said: --  
"Us knows not, dreams not,  
Where you be, Turvey,  
unless in the deep blue sea;

But axcusing silver --  
And it comes most willing --  
Here's us two paying  
our forty shilling;

For it's sartin sure, Turvey,  
Safe and sound,  
You danced us a square, Turvey,  
Off the ground."

## APPENDIX B

### LETTER OF PERMISSION TO USE MUSICAL EXCERPTS

**Music Sales West**  
**G. Schirmer, Inc.**  
1247 Sixth Street  
Santa Monica, CA 90401  
United States of America  
Telephone: +1 310.393.9900  
Fax: +1 310.393.9925  
Email: info@musicsales.com  
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